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THE LURE OF POLARIS

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Novelet*

By WALLACE
WEST

THE LAKE OF THE GONE FOREVER

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VOL. XXXV, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

October, 1949

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THE LURE OF POLARIS

By WALLACE WEST

When the world is heading for Hades in a straitjacket, it takes the strange alien pog creatures to set the Earth in order!

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

WE are about to print a letter jointly written by two of our more approbrious readers, Les and Es Cole, of 1616 Costa Avenue, Richmond, California. And then we are going to take the considerable liberty of demolishing their proposition. Our motives therefore will, we hope, become readily apparent as we progress. But first the letter—

Dear thing: Just a quickie while we plead, we beg, we beseech, we supplicate.

The balance of life is so delicate, the ecology so subject to chance, we wonder how in the name of le Bon Dieu you can print such stories as *LIKE A KEEPSAKE* or *SEA KINGS OF MARS*.

Regardless of the plot involved, the occurrence of the life-forms involved is what bothers us. The odds are incalculable that the humanoid form will exist (or does!) on our sister planets. Then try and figger the factors needed for Homo cf. sapiens!!!!

As for cross-metling, as implied in them little ditties, give us better a specimen of Neanderthel wench. There'd be more in common. We're so mad we may do a story ourselves, exposing the ecological greft in *TWS & SS*.—Les & Es Cole.

Okay, go to it, Coles. If you can come up with a good one we'll run it. But we can't see your premise of complaint for small beer or peanuts. As we understand it, the whole concept of science fiction is that of the fantasy or the legend—with the magic wand replaced by super-electronic theory or some equivalent.

Now the entire basis of such fantasy is the refutation of probability—not necessarily in favor of wish fulfillment but definitely for the creation of more novelty of idea and concept. Thus the science fiction yarn may vary either slightly or vastly from reality.

Certainly, such stories as those which dealt with poltergeists and their kitchen antics or Ali Baba and his cave of stolen treasure are far closer to the everyday life of their era of composition than the numerous dragon-slaying episodes contempora-

neous with them. Yet the one story type is exactly as fanciful as the other.

No Restrictions!

So it is with science fiction, Raymond F. Jones' novelet, *THE ALIEN MACHINE*, in our June issue, is certainly much closer to present-day life and laboratory existence than is, say, *SEA KINGS OF MARS*, to which you Coles take such exception.

The one simply deals with an engineer being put through a series of tests by strangers possessed of a scientific culture far beyond any he has yet encountered. The other deals with time travel and strange Gods and demons of the Red Planet, over a scope of perhaps millions of years.

Yet both stories are science fiction! In each the explanation reaches for and, to our way of thinking, touches reader credibility.

If Miss Brackett's explanations seem thin beside the more familiar, prosaic detail of Mr. Jones—they seem thin only when viewed in the atmosphere of the other story. An environment in which no fair judgment can be made.

The chief virtue of science fiction to our way of thinking is that it imposes no restrictions upon the author save those of editor and reader credibility. If he wants to prove the Moon to be made of green cheese he is free to do so—and has more than once, quite convincingly.

If he wishes to prove that our planet is actually a form of organic life—like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famed Professor Challenger in *WHEN THE EARTH SCREAMED*—he is free to do so. If he wishes to put an end to the world—as did John D. MacDonald in that *LIKE A KEEPSAKE*

SAKE to which you object—he is free to do so.

Freedom and Fiction

And you, dear Coles, are not only free to object—you are free to sit down and write yourselves a story proving all your pet ecological theories. More important, if it comes out good enough, you'll probably get paid for it. Freedom is the very soul of science fiction.

For those whose dictionaries are not within reach, ecology is the relationship of living organisms to their environment. The Coles seem to think it most unlikely that anything even faintly resembling ourselves should be found on other planets (and a very good thing too). But there is always the possibility, no matter how faint. Scientific history is full of long chances paying off at far better than track odds.

We question the ecological possibilities of the Neanderthal wench, however. Do you think she would fit into a world dedicated to the various and sundry "feminine daintinesses" of our advertisers? On the whole, we prefer octopus—especially when crisply fried in olive oil.

So, in signing off, let us say that we are waiting to hear from the Coles in manuscript form—and that argument, like freedom from other restrictions, is one of the factors that has made science fiction the liveliest thing in the present-day literary scene.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

JAMES BLISH, whose **MISTAKE INSIDE, THE WEAKNESS OF RVOG** and other notable stories and novelets have graced the pages of TWS and its Companion magazine, **STARTLING STORIES**, from time to time in recent years, has come up with his most brilliant and ambitious effort to date, a short novel entitled **LET THE FINDER BEWARE!** which will lead our December issue.

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(Continued on page 145)

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GIVE ME THE THIRD
DEGREE. I'M GOIN'
WITH YOU



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THE RIVER PIRATES PREPARE TO MAKE OFF
WITH A PRIZE HAUL...



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UNDER THE COAL, SINK
OUR BOAT, AND
TOMORROW WE'RE
THERE

NEAT?
YOU SAID
IT!



THAT'S BERT'S
SIGNAL!

I'LL RADIO THE
LAUNCH TO
INTERCEPT THEM
AT KINGS POINT



COME ON, TRY THESE
FOR SIZE

SO YOU'RE
A COPPER!



BIG STUFF, BERT.
THE OLD MAN
HIMSELF IS ON
THE WAY UP

WOW! I'D
BETTER GET RID
OF MY COAL DUST
AND WHISKERS



BLADE?
TRY A
THIN
GILLETTE



SAY, THIS IS
THE BLADE I'VE
BEEN LOOKING
FOR! WHAT A
SWELL, SMOOTH
SHAVE!

OUR BOYS
GO FOR THIN
GILLETTES.
THEY'RE EXTRA
KEEN



YOU'VE SAVED
MR. ELKTON'S FIRM
A LOT OF MONEY,
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ALERT. I CAN USE A
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Sergeant
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When the world heads for Hades in a straitjacket, it takes the strange alien pog creatures to put the earthly house in order!

A Novelet by WALLACE WEST

CHAPTER I

Departure for Earth

CAPTAIN HARKNESS stared glumly at the door of the teleport as the chronometer bit off lazy seconds. A wisp of smoke rose straight from his forgotten cigarette. A one-winged fly, made bold by the silence, zoomed round and round the room like a dry leaf which could not fall.

A minute passed—two—three—an endless four. The round rivet-studded door remained stubbornly shut. As the second hand completed its fifth turn the tall earthman gave the door a vicious kick and stalked to the station window.

"They've forgotten us again?" The Martian girl put down the book she had

been pretending to read, ruffled her scarlet plumage and sang rather than spoke the words.

"Um! For the tenth week they've missed the fourteen-thirty food shipment."

"But we have enough food for two weeks." She shifted into anapaests, as she often did when she was worried, joined him at the window and threw one wing protectingly over his bowed shoulders.

"And the 'ponics can't possibly start bearing for a month . . . if they bear at all." Unmindful of the cigarette still smoldering on the edge of the ash tray he ripped another from its tube and inhaled deeply. "We might as well face it. We're forgotten—marooned here."

"Then why don't *we* forget?" She put the question in a minor key.

"We *can't* forget. We're hungry."

"Maybe they'll get hungry." This in a hopeful trill.

"They're hungry now, Yahna. Why do you suppose they sent us to explore this God-forsaken system? But it's not a focused hunger like ours. They'll remember that they've forgotten something all right. But they won't remember *what* they've forgotten unless some fool runs across the right memo."

"Jack, what'll we do?" She tried to adjust her wide, heavy-lidded eyes to the jagged vari-colored rapidly-moving lights and shadows outside the window as though the answer might be found there.

"You or I will have to go back to Earth." He clasped her incredibly slim hand in his. "We can't both go and abandon the start we've made here—or can we?"

"No," she sang softly. "This is a lovely beautiful world, now that we're learning to *see* it."

"And it's the only habitable world within forty light years of the Solar System."

"And they simply can't remember?"

"Right. But they're certainly missing plenty when they forget you." He kissed her pert nose.

THEN, with an abrupt change of mood, "It's idiotic! Why can't I just reach through that 'port and boot some official earthly pants. Going back—leaving you here alone with the Pog—I don't like that, no matter how co-

operative it—or they—have been up to now.

"Then there's the time lost from our work. A month or two at least jogging the memories of the high brass. And, well, there's always the off-chance that I'll forget too. Forty light years is a long way to remember."

"You're just joking I know." That minor anapaest again.

"Well, how about Bill? We sent him back three months ago."

"But we're different, Jack. We're in love."

"Yes, I know, pigeon. I couldn't really forget you and your funny feathers but back home I might mislay you, so to speak. I don't want to take the chance, that's all."

"But why do people—just forget? I well remember Mars."

"Do you though? What's the name of the theatre where you were flying when I—er—kidnaped you?"

"What a silly question!" Her piquant face went blank with concentration and the rhythm of her song broke. "It was the—the— It was called the—"

"Exactly. You can't remember the name any more—and neither can I. That's why I asked you. We're forgetting many things out here near Polaris. The name of the last show we saw together on Earth. The hotel where everybody made such a fuss over us in New York. Little things still, of course."

"But why?" She hit a high C in her exasperation.

"My guess is that it's because we're so far away. I can't think of any better reason right now."

"When we ran off to Pluto we didn't forget."

"Pluto's just a whoop and a holler from Earth these days. People have got used to thinking in distances like that. Interstellar teleportation, though, is a different kettle of fish."

"I still don't understand." She then changed pace as she often did when a thought struck her. "Until teleports came it would take weeks and weeks just to get from my Mars to Earth. Now we go in a flash. You would think—"

"Darling!" Jack's voice took on a patient note. She was such a child about things. "I've told you and told you that elapsed time has nothing to do with it. It's distance that makes folks forget."

Yahna swooped to the ceiling and kicked her trim heels with delight



"Bil was a pretty good psychologist, if you still remember. He put it this way— In the early days of the Christian era the Romans established a thriving colony in Britain. Later they called their Legions home to fight some war or other and what happened? They clean forgot they ever had a colony.

"Half a thousand years later, the Vikings colonized Greenland. Ships traveled back and forth across the Atlantic all the time. The Catholic Church even sent a bishop to the new land. Yet after awhile the Vikings forgot all about Greenland and let it go back to the Eskimos by default."

"That was an awfully long time ago."

"Yes, but how about the first Moon expedition in nineteen fifty? The explorers landed safely. The headlines were full of it. Then the Atomic War broke out—and everybody forgot. The poor devils were left stranded. They starved to death. It wasn't until the second expedition was proposed in nineteen seventy-six that anybody remembered the first one."

"We don't forget the Moon Base now."

"No, because our memory horizon has expanded through the years. In the old days that horizon extended only a few hundred miles. Then it stretched to thousands and finally millions of miles. But it hasn't expanded far enough yet to handle light years. We're shipwrecked."

"I don't believe a word you say. That memo will turn up again."

"And some Earthbound non-com will puzzle over it, scratch his head and mark it 'Return to File.' No, my little feathered friend, one of us will have to chance it and go back."

"Hard radiation spoils my complexion."

"You mean that teleport trips make you molt," he grinned. "What a mess you were on that first trip before we got the station set up here." His attempt at lightness choked off. He swept her frail body into his embrace, held her tight. She sighed, slipped her arms around his neck, then wrapped him almost out of sight in her wings.

"I'll come back," he said after a long time. In spite of himself there was a faint note of doubt in his tone.

"You will come back!" There was no doubt whatsoever in her rich contralto.

THE teleport door clicked shut. Yahna shifted the controls to *Transmission* and pushed a stud. Then, as the station lights dimmed from the surge of power needed to operate the space wrap, she slumped against the board and sobbed. That mysterious vanishment always reminded her of an old O. Henry story in one of Jack's books — story which mentioned that prison lights dimmed when a criminal was electrocuted.

At last she shook herself like the bird she almost was and tried to impress indelibly on her memory how her man had looked. *She* could never forget but—but—that freckle on his nose. . . . Was it on the right or the left side? Left? Right? Left? Had there been a freckle even? Had there been a—Jack Harkness?

To hold back rising hysteria Yahna sprang erect and trilled imperiously. At the sound a door opened, closed and a soft voice fumbled, "Yahna call Pog?"

"Bring me my coat, please."

A shadowy thing brought the garment across the room. It was not exactly a coat. Rather it resembled a sleeping suit, such as children wear, with mittens and socks attached. The hood was completely enclosed except for an inset containing a pair of prismatic goggles.

Yahna waited patiently as the suit enveloped her and was zipped up the back, leaving a clumsy bunching over her wings. Then she turned and studied the little being who awaited further orders with primly folded "hands." The creature was humanoid—with differences. She wanted to laugh but didn't, remembering her own wings and feathers.

"Do you think I'll learn to stand the light outside in time, Pog?"

"Learn. No learn." Her servant flicked a hairy ear which, even looked at through the polarized goggles, was almost transparent. "More good now than when first come."

"Would you Pogs like more of us to come and see you?"

"If you no happy *there*, yes. Pog folk manage."

"Don't you know that, when men come, men rule?"

"Maybe so. Maybe not so." He scratched his bare body luxuriously. As usual she was vaguely disturbed be-

cause she could see his liver, heart and other vital organs right through his skin. "Better more man come here, be happy, than no come, be no happy. Then man come anyway and Pog folk no be happy too."

"You are a philosopher, Pog."

"All Pog philosopher."

"Now let's go and see the gardens."

The thing opened the outer double door of the station. Yahna emerged into a world which, seen through her goggles, was no longer a confused mass of ragged shadows. In fact, it looked much like an Arizona desert except that it was lighted by three madly-hurting suns one blue, one white and one deep orange.

Even so the girl stumbled frequently as she walked along, due to constantly-crawling reflections from the jumble of rock, sand and translucent plants.

"Feathered people visit Pog before."

She stopped dead, her eyes fixed on a distant, rainbow-shrouded peak which broke the vast expanse of semi-arid plain.

"When was that?"

"Long time. Boss Pog plenty."

"Did other creatures come here?"

"No. All other thing happy. Stay home. People your sun always unhappy. Seek happiness far away. Find death most time."

"Here?" She shivered.

"Here. Flying people eat Pog food. Most die quick. Pog not know then. Know now. Tell Yahna, Jack, Bill."

"Thank you, Pog. And those who didn't—die quick?"

"They too few to run big spaceship. Stay here. Some die slow from sadness. Some forget. Become like Pog from eating Pog food."

"Oh!" So the Martians had mislaid an ancient interstellar colony just as they later had colonized and then forgotten Atlantis.

"Pog think maybe so Yahna inspect 'ponics now?"

She sighed and followed him obediently. Not far from the severely functional adobe station, at the end of a path fringed with pale blossoms which turned to watch their progress, the strangely assorted pair came to a large greenhouse. There, under thick quartz—the roof had been brought pane by pane through the teleport during the early months of their stay—was grow-

ing a selection of homely vegetables from the Solar System.

Tomatoes, corn, potatoes, Martian cactus and Venusian yar had been planted in big tanks and protected from the crazy light which had destroyed a first crop planted under the harsh Polartarian sky. The corn was tasseling already. Green tomatoes peeped through luxuriant foliage. The fuzzy yar breathed regularly through fishlike gills. Nevertheless, Yahna got an odd impression that the vegetables were not quite comfortable.

"Plant no happy. Want go home."

"Nonsense."

"Plant talk to Pog!" His nose tip turned up firmly.

"Have it your way." She checked solutions and temperatures, adjusted a shutter to protect a tray of sickly tomatoes. And always her mind raced like a motor without a flywheel.

With Jack around there was always so much work to do—more than could be done even with endless triple-sunned days to do it in. But now, what would she do after finishing at the greenhouse. Read a book? Sing? Wring her hands? Scream?

"Pog."

"Yes." He put down a watering pot.

"Will Jack come back to me—or will he forget?"

"Jack come back. No worry."

If a glass doll could be said to smile Pog was smiling as he busied himself among the plants.

CHAPTER II

World Gone to Seed

HARKNESS recovered from his blackout with his right leg numb. It hampered his movements as, tortured by the claustrophobia which always gripped him when in the teleport, he squirmed madly until he could release the door latch of his coffin-like stygian locker. Groaning from the pins and needles of returning circulation, he wriggled out and lowered himself to the catwalk which ran past scores of similar cubicles.

The big room, he noticed at once, had an air of semi-abandonment. An empty

cigarette tube crunched under his numb foot as he stumbled about. There was a pile of dust-covered crating in front of a 'port marked *Sirius Gamma*. No attendants were on duty.

"Hello!" he shouted.

Only echoes answered.

Gripping a handrail to steady his wobbly leg and refusing to glance down at the floor, which lay fifty feet below the bank of strap-iron walkways, he edged toward a faraway door. As his body came back to normal he moved faster until he was sprinting.

The 'portroom door was unlatched and swinging creakily in a faint draft. On the other side was a power station where soaring generators hummed to themselves. A lone attendant was on duty there. The jacket of his uniform was unbuttoned and he was smoking in defiance of regulations. He glanced at Jack, nodded casually and resumed contemplation of his stereocomic.

This was much worse, the spaceman thought, than it had been during his last trip home. The base must be going to pot. He checked his own appearance in the mirror-like surface of the nearest generator, combed his mussed hair, straightened his tie and went on.

The next room was a warren of activity. Hundreds of technicians in greasy overalls were scampering about it as though the devil were after them. Orders were being bawled through loudspeakers. In the center of the floor a shimmering machine of some sort was rising.

"Excuse me!" Jack stopped a hurrying cadet. "Can you tell me—"

"Sorry!" The youngster tried to dodge past him, then relaxed a bit when he caught sight of the Space Explorer insignia. "Sorry, sir. We're five days and three hours behind on this project already. I haven't time to stop. You'd better talk to General Brown." He fled.

Curiouser and curiouser, thought the captain. He fought his way through the mob, located another corridor and finally found himself in the outer office of Major General Horace Brown. He hardly recognized the place, which had been entirely redecorated.

A trim WAC sergeant stopped touching up her teeth with pink enamel to take his name.

"Ah doan think the general can see youall now," she snipped. "He's awful

busy on the new Operation."

"Be a good girl and tell him that Captain Harkness must see him on a matter of utmost importance."

"Captain John Harkness?" Her blue eyes became even rounder. "Oh, that's different. Youall make yo'se'f at home. Ah'll be right back." She tripped toward a door marked *Private*, making sure that her hips, in their tight shorts, rotated to the best advantage.

A bull roar from the inner room greeted her report. A big man, whose big head looked even larger under its brush of snow white hair, came charging in.

"Well, Jack, you old son of a gun!" bellowed the general. "Where have you been hiding? Been hunting all over for you the last six months. Fact is, I wrote a scorching memo to Science and Tech just last week. Accused them of stealing you from me. Come in. Come on in."

He grabbed his visitor by the arm and propelled him into a—Jack was at a loss to describe the place. Brown's private office was built like the interior of a mammoth terrestrial globe. The continuous "wall" was a detail map of the earth. The general's cluttered desk squatted on a central platform supported by an hydraulic column and could only be reached by means of a catwalk.

"How do you like my new setup?" he thundered, pleased as a child. "Watch this." When they reached the platform he manipulated a bank of levers. They soared toward the ceiling until Jack ducked his head in terror, then descended toward the bottom of the globe at dizzying speed.

"But what's it for?" the spaceman gasped when the platform came to rest in the center of the void.

"Only way I can keep in touch with things, they move so fast these days. The United Nations has built 'em in all of the world's capitals. I get my boys in here. Then we'll say Marshal Autrey gets his boys together in the globe at Paris. We switch on the 'visor—and it's almost like sitting in the same room. Yes, siree."

He picked up a baton, pointed it at San Francisco and pushed a button. A pinpoint of light illuminated the California city. He moved the baton slowly and a phosphorescent pathway linked San Francisco with Sitka, Alaska.

"See how it works, Jack. Have the

world at our fingertips. Couldn't get along without it."

"Yes, sir, but—"

"This new Operation, now. Couldn't even begin to plan it without this layout. Oh, of course, if we had a real world government I could manage everything myself. But so long as U.N. is still a federation— Why, let me tell you that—"

"Yes, sir," Jack interrupted firmly this time. "I'd like to hear all about it later. 'But first I'd like to give you a report on Operation Polaris. We're in a jam there and—"

"Operation Polaris?" The older man looked blank. "I don't get you."

"I just got in from Polaris three, sir. We're running short of food there, so I—"

THE general rocked with laughter. "You don't have to make excuses to me, boy," he shouted. "I never was one to go in for spit and polish. If you've been AWOL let's just forget about it. Don't blame you for taking a little extra leave now and then. We all do. Been lovenesting somewhere with that little Martian trick, I'll bet. No! Don't tell me. Don't want to know. Let me show you something else I have here—"

"Listen to me just a moment, sir." Jack gripped the great man's flabby arm. "You must listen. Supplies have stopped coming through to Polaris three. Fact is, I think the whole Interstellar Section must be in a mess. You've got to do something."

Brown's majestic front crumpled like a pricked balloon. His handsome face puckered like that of a scolded child.

"'You've got to do something,'" he mimicked. "Jumping planets! What do you think I'm doing twenty-four hours a day? The world's starving to death and you bull your way in here yammering about Interstellar. Man, Interstellar was taken off priority months ago."

He began to get back into his stride. "Now we've got something really hot. We're melting the Polar ice cap. That job has a triple-A rating. U.N. is on my neck about it all the time. That's why I've been hunting for you—to act as my executive officer on it. We'll soon be uncovering millions of acres of arable land. . . . Ought to have some crops in two years from now."

"What about the Sahara Irrigation

Project, sir? That was almost completed when I left. You were all hopped up about it."

"The *what* project?" Brown gripped his hair with both hands.

"The Sahara project."

"Oh, *that*! Why—uh—I've forgotten the details. Maybe Sergeant Schultz will remember. You do ask the damnest questions. Schultzie! *Schultzie!*" he yelled and pushed a button

"What happened to Sahara?" he roared when the pert WAC appeared.

"Oh, *that*!" She flashed Jack a completely pink smile. "Ah guess it was a flop—as usual. When they finished the canal and let water in from the Mediterranean it played hob with the adiabatic—"

"Rained forty days and forty nights or thereabouts. Washed all the humus out of the ground and into Lake Sahara. Now No'th Africa is so eroded it doan' even grow sagebrush."

"What happened to the 'ponics?" Harkness persisted when the WAC had withdrawn.

"'Ponics!' whooped Brown. "People dying like flies and you ask about 'ponics. Couldn't grow enough food in them if we turned the entire earth into a confounded frog pond."

"Any progress on synthesis?"

"Synthetic food plants all over the place and we still can't make enough yeast even. And did you ever try eating yeast three times a day? The Africans got so tired of it they staged a revolution."

"Well, then, what about Interstellar? Surely—"

"Interstellar! Interstellar!" snarled Brown. "Captain, if you say that word again I swear I'll slap you in the guard-house. Here I'm going crazy over Operation Arctic and you blather about something that's as good as canceled. Three hundred and eighty-seven active projects to keep in line and you—"

He slumped forward on his desk, cradled his head in his arms and began sobbing uncontrollably.

For a moment Jack stared blankly at his superior officer. The Old Man really was going to pieces. He shook the bowed shoulder but the sobs continued unabated. In despair he rang for Schultzie.

"The Old Man has tantrums three or foah times a day," she said uncon-

cernedly as she turned to the water cooler. "Ah'll mix him a bromide. He'll be all right after he's had a nap."

"Look, sergeant," said Jack, after she had induced the general to drink and he had relaxed into a moaning slumber. "The Old Man needs a leave. Why doesn't he take it?"

"And who would relieve him?"

"Why, there must be plenty of officers."

"Practically everybody above the rank of colonel is either dead, in the booby hatch or undergoing Psycho."

"Good Lord! That bad?"

"Worse." She dropped her southern accent and went straight to the point. "The world death rate has doubled in the last year. Here at home dust storms are sweeping from the Rockies to the Appalachians."

"The world is down to an eighth of an acre of arable land per person and the United States isn't a lot better off. Do you wonder that we're all going nuts? If there's another flop with Operation Arctic—"

"Look," he said, "you seem to be the only person around here who isn't off the rocker. How about having a bite with me tonight and talking things over?"

"A bite?" She looked at him dubiously. "You mean go to a yeast bar? I'd almost rather starve."

"I think we could do better than that. I have five years' pay coming."

"How much of it will you spend?" A feral gleam appeared in her eyes.

"What'll it take?"

"For two hundred dollars I know where we can get a horse steak—I think. I'd give my right leg for a piece of steak."

"That would be a pity."

"And afterward, why anything you—"

"Forget it. What about him?"

"He'll be out for two hours. By that time the night sarge will be on duty. I'll hang up the *Don't Disturb* sign. Let's scram. My first name is Mary, in case you'd prefer not to call me Schultzie, which I hate."

EXTREMELY conscious of her warm hand on his arm, Jack escorted her toward the elevator, learning the while that she had an apartment on upper Second Avenue.

"Maybe we'd better walk," she said as he started to press the *Down* button. It's only fifteen floors and I don't trust these patched-up elevators after what happened yesterday."

She shuddered and refused to elaborate any further.

They did walk down to the Park Avenue exit. Jack surveyed the city with a critical eye, although he knew that it could not have changed much—and then only for the worse—since his grandfather's day.

The marmoth Army Building, final addition to United Nations City, towered sphynxlike and windowless in the van of its slab-sided neighbors. South and west were the tarnished glories of Radio City, the Chrysler Building—nobody had yet bothered to repair its tipsy needle—and the Empire State. Vehicular traffic looked scimpier than he had remembered it.

"Think we could find a taxi?"

"My, you *have* been away! The Army took the last ones off the streets in January. . . . Had to requisition the steel in them for scrap. We'd better take the 'L.'"

"Say, whatever became of the Martians? The corridors used to be full of them."

"Most of them went home after the dust got bad. They had been mainly interested in buying food here, of course. When no more was available for export they pulled up stakes. Said they could starve more comfortably on their own planet."

"No more spaceships?" He felt a sense of unutterable loss.

"Oh, a few still run. They carry mail, diplomats, thorium in exchange for condensed oxygen—there's no shortage of that here yet, thank heaven. We imported a lot of yar from Venus until last year, when the colonies there revolted and suddenly slammed the door on us."

A man in tatters was sitting on the first step of the rust-flaked "L" stairs as they approached. Mary brushed his shoulder slightly as she passed. He toppled over on the sidewalk and lay still. The girl continued upward as though nothing had happened.

"Wait a minute," Jack called after her. "We'll have to notify the police. This fellow is either sick or dead drunk."

"Don't bother. He's probably dead. The meat wagon will pick him up."

"Dead!"

"Starvation," she explained patiently. "It happens all the time. Used to give me the willies but I had to get used to it."

"Aren't there any food stations or anything?"

"For native New Yorkers, yes. That fellow probably hiked in from the dust bowl to beg. The Psychos ordered the dust bowlers to stay put. We can't take care of them if they disobey orders. Oh, do come along. The restaurants stop serving at nineteen o'clock."

They climbed the littered stairs, boarded a century-old train. It rolled northward on bumping wheels between tenements whose inmates were washing, eating or making love, just as oblivious to passengers' stares as their forefathers had been.

Once the dirty windows of the car blazed for a few seconds as they reflected the flare of a rocket taking off for Mars from LaGuardia Field.

Otherwise, Jack reflected, they might have been making a rush hour trip in the early twentieth century—except for two things.

"Folks don't read newspapers any more," he commented, "and they're not wearing as many clothes as they used to."

Mary's heart-shaped hollow-cheeked face, pressed close to his by the mob of straphangers, regained some of its animation.

"No more newsprint," she explained. "We have to depend on the 'visors. And there aren't many clothes to wear, either. No more sheep, of course, with the topsoil blown off all the western and Australian ranges and the cotton crop has burned up three years hand-running."

"The Army takes most of the rayon and nylon. A girl is lucky these days if she has more than a bra and a pair of shorts to her name. That's one reason I joined up. They do give me a uniform to hide my nakedness."

"I suppose people never dress for dinner any more then." He felt better about his khaki.

"Oh, all the women do," she laughed. "That's why you're taking me home—to get my energizer. You'll be surprised."

CHAPTER III

They Can't Remember

ARRIVED at her tiny one-room apartment, Jack sat on an unupholstered sofa while he waited for Mary to take a shower and retouch her teeth. There were a few ancient and dog-eared romantic novels in the bookcase but no magazines. Naturally, he thought—paper would be practically non-existent now that all forests had been buried by dust or cut down to make room for the cultivation of food crops.

He switched on the 'visor and sat up with a jolt as the screen showed the shipment of the last carload of ore from the Mesabi Range. A sad-voiced announcer made much of the occasion, which marked the exhaustion of America's once-rich source of iron and steel.

"Mary," he called, "what happened to the plan to extract magnesium from sea water?"

"No time to develop it. Had a Priority Y, last I heard. The world is running on scrap and atomic energy. Here, I'll show you." The bathroom door slid open. The girl stepped out, clad in a radiant smile—and a nimbus of equally radiant light.

"What the—?" He shielded his eyes and blinked at the soft streamers of opaque color. They flowed about her like the petals of some magic flower, leaving only her head, her arms and her gold-sandaled feet visible.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Mary was practically dancing over the effect she had achieved. "Folks are getting so used to these atomic energizers that I'd almost forgotten the uproar they made when they were introduced last year."

"I've worked out a lot of new combinations. I want to be a dress designer after I've served my hitch. The Hattie Carnegie Foundation is going to start marketing some of my ideas soon. Then maybe I'll have enough money to buy a cow steak once in a while. Look!"

She held out a slim wrist circled by a bracelet-like affair surmounted by several banks of tiny keys.

"See. I have it on *Day* now, to startle you. I'll cut it down to night range. There! How do you like me?"

He liked her very much as the brilliance faded, leaving her bathed in clinging pastel streamers which reached to the floor.

"Pretty," He applauded as she pirouetted and strutted.

"Of course, I can change colors and combinations as I please. For the opera, there's this." Instantly she was clothed in a sheath of white which left her shoulders and dimpled back bare.

"For intimate occasions I can cut the power 'way down and switch in the pulsator."

THE spaceman gulped as every curve and sweet line of her was revealed in dreaming, swirling mist.

"Finally, I can switch it off entirely." She demonstrated.

"Put it back on *Day* quick, if you want that steak," he managed to gasp. "What's the younger generation coming to?"

They found a little restaurant around the corner where a seven-toned drum orchestra was beating out Venusian rhythms. Too-slim flame-clad girls were dancing on a postage-stamp floor with cadaverous escorts in prosaic shorts and T-shirts.

"Silly, isn't it?" chattered Mary after a surreptitious waiter had taken Jack's two hundred dollars and brought them their steak disguised under a blanket of potato chips. It came from an overage Army mule, Jack could have sworn after the first mouthful but that made no difference to his ravenous guest.

"Men just won't wear energizers. Think they're effeminate. I'm working on that now. Give me time and I'll make it imitate a full dress uniform—complete with brass buttons.

"Don't pay any attention to *him*," she added hastily as a man who had been sitting at the adjoining table got up and moved pointedly to another farther away. "He acts righteous because we're eating steak but he's just jealous because he hasn't the two hundred bucks to buy one."

"Mary," Jack said after the meat course when they were dawdling over their alleged coffee and ice cream, "stop rhapsodizing about the energizer and fill me in on what's happening in the world. I haven't been home for five years. Things were bad enough when I left but not this bad. What's going on?"

SUDDENLY she was serious—and tense as a violin string.

"People just can't remember!" Absent-mindedly she fiddled with the keyboard on her wrist until she sat across from him, seemingly dressed in a drab nun's habit.

"Stop that! What do you mean—'Can't remember'?"

"There's just too much." Her tinted teeth looked ghastly in a face gone white as paper. "Why do you ask me? I'm not an expert, thank heaven. That is, not until I master the energizer. Then I suppose they'll be after me."

"Snap out of it, Mary. Start at the beginning."

"Well," she took a cigarette from him with trembling fingers, "it's been going on for centuries, I guess, but nobody realized it. No, that's not the beginning."

She tried again. "You see, knowledge has become so diversified—the Unified Field Theory and all that. Nobody could hope to understand all of it. People became experts in their own specialized lines. They had to work together—like this." She interlaced her fingers.

"Then, there was another thing. The physical sciences somehow got the jump on the natural sciences. We learned how to make things—gadgets. We improved our standard of living but we never bothered to learn how to live together, to husband our resources. Oh, Jack, I'm making such a mess of this."

"You're doing all right."

Well, the world neglected its—its future, I guess you'd say. As the population shot above the three billion mark it kept right on mining its farms, using oil like water, finishing up the coal and iron and bauxite and timber.

"The more people there were, the more food there had to be found. So we wore out our topsoil until it washed down the rivers like sand. Finally we had only about half an acre of good land left per person all over the world."

"I know most of that," he prodded. "But in spite of everything we managed pretty well. We reached Mars. We colonized Venus—and looted it, of course. We even stretched out our hands toward the stars."

"Then something happened. What was it? That's what I've got to know. Bill Newsome had a theory that we were forgotten out on Polaris three because

the distance was too great but the same thing seems to be going on right here at home. Whatever happened to Bill, by the way?"

"He cracked up—but good. He came into the office just like you did, breezy and cocky. I fell for him hard. I liked him a lot—more than I'll ever like any other man. In those days I was a dumb cluck all of the time, like I am now most of the time. Before the Psychos took him Bill explained a lot of things to me. I wish now he hadn't."

Jack signaled to the hovering waiter.

"Don't order Scotch," said Mary, divining his intention. "It's out of this world expensive. If you ask for Rye or Bourbon, they'll charge you double and give you Syn anyway."

"Two Syn highballs," he ordered. Then, "Did Bill try to get us any help out on Polaris?"

"At first he talked about nothing else. But nobody paid a bit of attention to him. The Old Man assigned him to Arctic. Pretty soon he was working twenty hours a day, trying to be a nuclear physicist, a zoologist, a civil engineer and heaven knows what else all at once. Then the Psychos got him, of course, but before he went—he sort of explained." She choked.

THE waiter returned then, with their drinks. In setting them down he accidentally touched one of the keys on the energizer. Mary turned into a pinwheel of red, white and blue fire. In the excitement of getting her dress stabilized they both had to laugh and the tension between them relaxed somewhat.

"He explained what?" Jack prompted

ed when they were alone again.

"Explained how civilization got away from us. That's what it began with the world-wide dust storms four years ago."

"I was on Polaris already by then. We heard something about the storms. The final death figure was over a billion, wasn't it?"

"Yes. A third of the world's population. It wasn't so bad here in New York. The Appalachians held off the worst of it, although we didn't see the sun for six weeks."

"When the storms abated the Great Basin had become a desert. The other continents were even worse off. The world was down to a quarter acre of arable land per capita. To make it worse most of the synthetic food plants and 'ponics had been buried beyond recovery."

"Tough!"

"Tough? That was nothing. The breakdown came because about ten thousand scientists suffocated or starved during those storms. The experts who were left alive didn't know the things the dead ones had known. They had their minds jam-packed with their own brands of information. That's when civilization started running down . . . like this." She untwined her fingers one by one.

"I don't follow you."

"All right. You can operate a tele-
port. But can you repair one?"

"Space-warp mathematics is not in my line."

"Of course not. And Professor Enggringen, the only man who fully understood the space-warp theory, is buried under a dustheap in Berlin."

[Turn page]

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"I begin to understand."

"Not yet. So the experts who remained rode off in all directions. Food reserves were running out fast. There was no time to train new scientists. So the old ones who were left tried to master new fields overnight. It was too big a job. They started cracking up right and left." She drained her highball and shivered.

"Then what happened?"

"The crackpots moved in and took over. At least that's what Bill called them. Nobody was left who could tell them from real scientists. They said they knew exactly what to do. The U.N., which was going wild, grabbed at the straw. The Army fell in line.

"We started project this and operation that. But we never finished anything and meanwhile the Four Horsemen were riding. Now do you understand why I play with a stupid gadget like the energizer. Oh, heck, Jack. Let's dance."

A long while—and innumerable dances and drinks—later, they stood at the street door of Mary's apartment.

"Come on in, honey chile." The girl lifted her wet frightened face to his. "I'm afraid to stay alone after talking to you like this. I'm afraid I might—"

"Nonsense." He smiled with a confidence he did not feel. "There's a way out. Keep your chin up and don't let your electronic slip show, my girl. If the worst comes we'll get Bill away from the Psychos and hightail it for Polaris."

"Will we?" Her face lit up. "Well then maybe I can get a little sleep after all. 'Night. Don't let the Psychos get you." She kissed him swiftly and ran up the steps, trailing clouds of glory.

JACK took the "L" to Forty-second Street and walked across to Times Square. Only half the bulbs were lit in the moving sign on the Times Building. They were spluttering some bulletin about a dust storm in Uruguay. Idly, he joined the old Broadway crowd and worked his way north.

There was a new play—a musical entitled "The Good Ol' Days" and evidently a big hit—at the Broadhurst. A chain bookstore was featuring *How to Remember*, by Dale Carnegie, 3rd, on shelves mainly devoted to old editions. The yeast bars were doing a thriving

business and the big electric signs blinked off and on as of yore.

There seemed to be plenty of power, but the shortage of materials was evident in the lack of new construction and the dearth of vehicles. A few U.N. limousines came and went, little flags fluttering from their sleek fenders. Otherwise the streets had been taken over by pedestrians.

A heaving mob filled every corner of Columbus Circle when he got there. Soap box orators by dozens were expounding to rapt audiences of emaciated men and women. One was elaborating some idea for planting shelter belts of trees at regular intervals across the country to control the dust.

Two others were wrangling as to whether big dams were better than reforestation for the purpose of raising the water table. A third, who stood under a banner reading *League of Survivors*, was shouting:

"I tell you, my friends and hungry fellow citizens, that only a return to the first principles discovered by that noble scientist, Sigmund Freud, can save this old earth from complete desolation."

Jack stood fascinated as the intense orator—some kind of workman, evidently, for he was dressed in blue overalls—went on to develop his theory.

"I tell you," he yelled, "that the Ego alone cannot—"

A heavy hand fell on the spaceman's shoulder. He turned to confront a youngster dressed in somber black.

"The Circle is out of bounds, Captain," whispered the intruder. "Better move along or I'll have to run you in."

"And who are you?"

The other flipped his lapel to disclose a badge. It meant nothing to Harkness but it did to a man, also dressed in overalls, who was crowded next to him.

"Psycho!" bellowed the laborer. "Here's a Psycho. Grab him, boys!"

"Yeh," echoed a companion, "and while we're at it let's get the soldier too."

The man in black already was on his way, turning, twisting, feinting, plunging like a football back at soft spots in the crowd. Jack followed, perforce, taking many wallops aimed at the other but benefiting from his evident experience in broken field running.

The crowd, which had been orderly

up to that moment, went wild. Luckily for the fugitives the howling excitement prevented organization of any real pursuit. Soon they had wormed their way out of the press and were sprinting down Broadway, pursued by only a half dozen diehards.

CHAPTER IV

Utter Chaos

As they reached Fifty-seventh Street, the Psycho whirled, dodged behind a lamp post, yanked out his Ultra Heat and sprayed the pavement just ahead of Blue Overalls and his gang. As the men skidded to a halt and flung up arms to guard their faces from flying goutts of incandescent asphalt the Psycho grabbed Jack by the arm and jammed him through a door which bore the inscription *substation 45*.

"See what I mean?" The man in black barred the door and holstered his gun. "The Circle is out of bounds. No mistake about it."

"I don't get it." Jack mopped his steaming face. "I'm just back from five years in Interstellar. What's up?"

"Interstellar? What's that?"

"You mean you don't remember?" Jack was recalling the publicity given his trip when he left New York.

"None of your cracks," the Psycho's eyes narrowed to slits, "or I *will* run you in."

"I'm sorry. I meant no offense. I've been away. I'm on Major General Brown's staff." He held out his credentials.

"Oh. Sorry, sir." This with a crisp salute. "Do you have a place to stay to-night?"

"Not yet."

"The hotels are badly crowded, what with the refugees and all. I think I can get you a room at the Astor though."

"Fine."

He whispered into his wrist phone for a few moments and reported, "It's all set. By the way, have you had your Routine, sir?"

"Routine?"

"Yes, routine checkup." The Psycho was frowning again.

"Do I need one?"

"You don't think we'd let you run around without one, do you?"

"Uh, I suppose not."

"Okay. I'll have a man around to see you at eight sharp." He made brisk notes on a pad hanging around his neck. "You want an escort to the hotel? The streets may be tough going. That mob is holding a big pow-wow at the Garden tonight."

"You let them hold mass meetings?"

"What can we do unless we call out the Army? Can't depend on the cops any more."

"I see." Jack realized the futility of trying to make sense out of their conversation. "Well, thanks for your help. I think I can make it without help. It's only a few blocks."

"Good luck." The Psycho opened the heavy door a crack, peered out, then held it wide. "Don't forget. Eight on the nose tomorrow."

Broadway seemed quiet enough although a few southbound passersby looked at his uniform askance. Just to be on the safe side he entered the first all-night haberdashery he found, bought a pair of shorts—for twenty-five dollars—changed into them and had the clerk send his other clothes to the hotel by messenger.

On impulse he dropped into a cafeteria which advertised that it specialized in yeast soup, yeast stew and grade A roast yeast. The food was awful, the "coffee" was undrinkable and, if he had entertained the hope of making any sense of the jigsaw puzzle in which he found himself involved, he was doomed to disappointment.

Most of the seedy occupants of the neighboring booths were show people, chattering the unintelligible jargon of their kind. Near the door another man in blue overalls—Jack began to guess that such clothing was a badge of authority—was haranguing three other living skeletons on the Freudian symbolism of dreams. Finding that he wanted to laugh out loud Harkness paid his fantastic bill and departed.

A bellhop showed him to his room, turned on the visor and the air conditioning and held out his hand.

"Where's my key?"

"Key?" The boy's meager face went blank. "You won't be needing a key to-night. The Psy—I mean, it's quite late—"

"No key, no tip."

"Yes, sir. I'll bring it right up." He darted out, slamming the door but failing to notice that Jack had slipped a *Do Not Disturb* sign between the lock and the jamb.

It was as he had suspected. The door could not be opened from inside without a key. Luckily the card had kept the latch from catching. After a decent interval he stepped out into the empty hall.

Now what? Some sort of conspiracy was under way. Psychos—psychiatrists, he supposed—screening people for what? Sanity probably—yet showing most of the stigmata of insanity themselves. Mobs that argued about Freud.

A girl who made magic with light and who probably was hiding under the covers of her lonely bed. His best friend in a padded cell or worse. His general in hysterics. His sweetheart in danger of starvation forty light years away. He himself supposedly locked in his room until his brains could be picked by some ghastly method. What to do?

He tiptoed down the corridor, tripping twice on the worn carpeting, dodged into Peacock Alley, which had its usual crowd of hangers-on, and reached the street apparently unnoticed. He toyed with the idea of returning to Mary's apartment and trying to get the full story from her. Instead he took the shuttle, transferred to the uptown subway and alighted at the Army building.

A sleepy sentry checked his credentials and waved him toward Brown's office. There a sleepy sergeant (male) said the general was still at work and announced him.

A bull roar answered. Brown, looking little the worse for his crackup, charged into the anteroom, white mane flying.

"Well, Jack, you old so and so," he bellowed. "I've been looking for you for the past year. Come in. Come on in. How do you like my new decor?"

"Sir," said Jack when they were seated again beside the mechanized desk on its agile pedestal, "I was here before today."

"You were?" The Old Man pinched his lower lip. "Oh, yes. So you were. Ready to go to work already?"

"No, sir. I've been thinking about this Operation Arctic. If you melt the ice

cap—I suppose you're planning to use nucleonics—you'll not only flood most of the world's coastal areas and great cities but you'll hike the world's mean temperature until the tropics become uninhabitable.

"If you do the job in a few years, as you plan, floods will leach out any humor that may be under the caps. Then you'll be in the same fix as you are in the Sahara."

"Why—why—this is subversive! The Psychos and the U.N. have approved the project in toto. Schultzie can give you answers to every one of your objections. I used to know them but I—I forget."

"Who are the Psychos? How come they're running the show?"

"Who are the Psychos? Boy, you need a Routine. Have you forgotten?"

"Have you forgotten that I've been away from New York for five years?"

"Oh. Yes, I did forget, but don't breath a word about it, my boy, or they'll give me a going over again. I—I couldn't take it."

"I won't if you'll tell me who they are."

"They're—They're—" The big man began to blubber. "Stop asking me those damned questions. I don't know who they are. Neither does anyone else, I guess. Now go away!"

For answer, Jack slapped him sharply across the face.

"Schult—" Brown started to shout. He brought up, eyes popping, as the spaceman's hand closed over his mouth. Realizing that he might face court martial and perhaps a firing squad, Jack nevertheless shook his superior officer roughly.

"Snap out of it, sir. This is no time for hysterics. Try to answer me."

"Why, you young whippersnapper, I'll have you—I'll—Uh—Now what was it you wanted to know?"

"The Psychos. Who are they? Think, man, think!"

"I'll try." Brown reached inside the mammoth desk, found a bottle of Syn and drank avidly before passing it on. "Stuff tastes like kerosene," he apologized. "Now, let's see. When the storms hit things went to pieces all at once. The farms had been so over-cultivated and the ranges so overgrazed that once we had a bad drought and they started to go they never stopped until the subsoil was exposed.

"The more dust there was in the atmosphere, the drier it got and the harder the wind blew. Never saw anything like it. And then, blooie, everything seemed to give, like in that old poem about the One Hoss Shay.

"Transportation, communication, research, manufacture, even the U.N. and the military split at the seams. Awful. Up to that time we'd been depending on—on—"

HE whipped his flagging memory. "Yes," depending on your confounded Interstellar to develop outlets for surplus population. Suddenly it was too late for that. The world was starving. Revolution, yes, and even cannibalism were spreading.

"That's when the Psychos stepped in." He took another drink. "Now what did they call themselves at first? Ego—oh, yes, Egocrats. At first everybody thought they were crackpots.

"They said the trouble had come about simply because mankind had too many inhibitions—had allowed itself to be controlled by its Super-Ego or Censor—you know, the old Freudian father-complex—fear of castration and all that.

"They said we must give our Egos full reign. We must be bold. We must strike out into new fields without fear. They promised that, if we let them guide us, they would bring order out of chaos and see that we didn't starve. And, by the Old Harry, they made good!

"How?"

"How! Why, first they convinced the Security Council that their theories should be given a try. That wasn't hard with everybody running 'round in circles.

"Then they called in all the world leaders who were left alive—there weren't more than a few thousand—and went over us with a fine-toothed comb. Psychoanalyzed us—that's how they got their nickname—integrated our personalities—suppressed our Super-Egos by hypnosis—set our Egos free.

"It's a wonderful treatment. I feel twenty years younger. Need hardly any sleep. Have no doubts, no fears of punishment or ridicule if a project fails. And the projects I think up for saving the world! Hundreds of them. All dif-

ferent. All brilliant. Any one of them will put the world back on its feet."

"But all of them going at once put it farther into the ditch!"

"What's that you say, captain? What that? Oh!" The general killed the bottle, then pulled out one of his innumerable card index files and stared at its contents. "Maybe you've got something there at that," he said ruefully. "Look. Here's priority Triple X—to make food from Plankton. Whatever can that be?"

"So your bosses are just a bunch of wacky psychiatrists?"

"No, I wouldn't say that. The psychiatrists act as their spokesmen, of course but I sometimes think there must be somebody behind them—somebody who is planning—" He glanced over his shoulder and then relapsed into silence.

"I hear that a lot of people have cracked up after treatment."

"Yes, the treatment is pretty heroic. Some minds can't take it, naturally. They crack up, either from overwork or, well, sheer exuberance at having no censor nagging at their minds. That's why there has to be a sort of mental police force to keep us on the beam. After that was set up everything worked smooth as cream. No trouble at all. No, sir. No trouble at all, any place."

"How about yeast riots and tonight's Madison Square Garden meeting?"

"Pinpricks, my boy. Pinpricks from the unreconstructed and from religious zealots."

"What about this League of Survivors?"

A film seemed to come over Brown's eyes as though his effort to remember had exhausted him.

"No more questions tonight," he groaned. "Please. I have a bale of reports to write. You'll have to excuse me. Come back tomorrow after you've had your Routine and I'll put you to work. Send Sergeant Schultz in when you leave."

"She's off duty, sir."

The general, bending over his desk, did not hear him.

Outside the building once more, Jack stood looking up at the moon. It was a red, gibbous orb which seemed covered with the same film which had clouded the general's eyes at the last. Dust, of course, from the interior of the country. Dust on the moon. Dust

clogging the world's machinery. Drifting dust in the minds of the only men who could have civilization from itself.

Wistfully he thought of Yahna, of her sweet face beneath its togue of shining feathers, her clean, windswept intelligence, her ability to strike straight at the heart of a matter when it seemed she was engaged only in idle chatter. A great hunger for her enfolding wings came over him.

Why shouldn't he leave this crazy, dying world? Why shouldn't he go back through the teleport? They could manage somehow out there near the hurtling Polarian suns.

Then, as clearly as though she had sung the words to him, he knew what he must do. He must take that Routine—and hold on to his sanity somehow while doing so. He must find Bill Newsome.

He knew that, wherever Bill might be, he would have remained at least partially sane. He must join forces with Mary—perhaps with those mysterious men in blue overalls—with anyone who retained a spark of common sense and balance and dared defy the Psychos.

Still following this line of thought, he returned to the Astor, removed the *Do Not Disturb* sign, stepped into his room and heard the lock click irrevocably behind him.

CHAPTER V

Psyché

AT eight o'clock "on the nose" there came a rapping at Jack's door.

A thin man, wearing dark glasses, a black beard and carrying a black bag, scuttled in and inquired, "Ready for your Routine, thir?"

"Here?" The spaceman had been up for an hour, expecting a call to some laboratory filled with mind-picking apparatus.

"Oh, yeth. All I require ith my hypnotither. And you'll need a complete reath in bed after I'm done. Juhth relacth in that chair and look at me when I thay tho."

He pulled down the shades and added, "By the way, you don't have a bite of food in your room, do you? I could-

n't buy breakfast anywhere thith morning. Everything wath thold out."

"Sorry. I haven't a thing."

The Psycho sighed and adjusted a gadget of mirrors and light beams. "Ready?"

"Yeth—I mean yes." Jack found that his heart was hammering.

The mirrors spun. The light beams interlaced, drawing his eyes.

"Relacth," purred the thir man. "Thleep. Thleep!"

Jack wanted to laugh. He wanted to curse. For a moment he fought the hypnotic suggestion frantically. Then he realized that that would not do. He had to *seem* to cooperate. He wouldn't really sleep. He would pretend to thleep, though. He wouldn't—he would—thleep—thleep—thleep. . . .

* * * * *

The spaceman awoke, yawning mightily, and was out of bed in one bound. A moment later he was singing lustily under an icy salt water shower. A beautiful day and not a moment to be wasted. The Old Man had a big job for him. Operation Arctic! Now there was something for a he-man to sink his teeth into. His mind teemed with ideas.

If the temperature of water vapor rising from the melting ice were raised sufficiently by radiation the moisture wouldn't precipitate until it was far out to sea. That would prevent excessive rainfall which could leach out the soil. Boy, there was a thought! Took a Jack Harkness to come up with things like that.

Of course, it would take a lot of radiation to do that—billions of horsepower, probably, but why worry about that now? Cross bridges when you came to them, that's what he always said. And if he put it over, he might be General Harkness one of these days, with no need to bow and scrape to an old fool like Brown.

Inexcusable the way Brown had messed up the Sahara Project. Why hadn't he, the brilliant Captain Harkness, been put on that before it was too late? Let's see, what had he been doing then. He cudgeled his brain but could not remember. Something highly important, of course. He'd think of it later.

Idea after idea tumbled through his mind as he dressed. All of them cen-

tered basically around just one subject—the importance of one Jack Harkness and the way he was going to set the world afire.

The man behind the drugstore counter said he was sold out but changed his mind when the captain waved a ten spot under his nose.

Pretty smart duck, that Psycho, he thought as he gobbled a skimpy breakfast. All those ridiculous inhibitions gone with the wind. Now, for the first time in his life he was a whole man. He could do anything. Just give him a little time.

Nothing in his mind to nag him about stupid things like being honest. Never give a sucker a break. That was his motto from now on. He'd climb right to the top of the heap—the U.N. secretariat maybe, or even the boss of the Psychos. First, of course, he'd have to straighten things out up north.

Now to get down to business.

WHISTLING gaily, walking on air, he strutted into the Army Building at noon and chucked Sergeant Schultz under her rounded chin.

"Lo." She smiled at him with eyes that were clear after a good night's sleep. Then her mouth corners drooped. "Oh—you've had your Routine already."

"Yep. Wonderful experience. Feel like a million."

"I'm sure you do. They all do—at first." Her tone was bitter. "What's the news from Polaris?"

"Polaris?" His exuberance vanished like a pinpricked toy balloon, leaving him filled with a vague unease—that feeling of emptiness he had experienced when thinking about the Sahara Project. "What do you mean, Polaris? Is it a riddle?"

"And how about Bill Newsome and your Martian friend Yahna?"

"Haven't seen 'em in years, honey." His face was dark. Then, shaking his head, he managed to break out of his mood. "Tell the Old Man I'm reporting for duty. And say, how about a date tonight?" He was casually undressing her with his eyes.

"Fresh!" She also discarded a dream. "Okay. Make yourself at home. I'll tell him." She rotated away.

Brown took his time. And when the captain at last was ushered into the circular office he was welcomed with

just a trace of coldness.

"Had your Routine, eh?" grunted the Old Man. "Feel you can run Operation Arctic all by yourself, I suppose?"

"Why no, sir," the spaceman lied, then couldn't help adding, "I was wondering though, why you didn't start with Antarctica. There's a whole continent under that ice cap while at the North Pole there's mainly water."

"You do have delusions of grandeur, all right," grinned Brown. "Antarctica is too big, even for us, just at present. We'll have to be content for a while with making Greenland and places like that habitable."

He rolled the spotlight baton between his palm and the gleaming desk top for a moment, then aimed it at Point Barrow, Alaska, and drew a phosphorescent line eastward to the Canadian border.

"Jansen's handling that sector of the front," he explained. "He hasn't too much to do. It's mainly a Navy job."

The light traveled farther eastward until it reached Baffin Bay.

"The Canadians and British are taking care of that stretch. The Russians," he gestured expansively, "are dealing with the Siberian end. I'm sending you to the Greenland base."

"Greenland. But I thought, sir, that—"

"That the Danes would be working there. Trouble is, they've refused to accept Psycho so far. That means they lack the initiative and imagination for a job like this. So Uncle Sam had to take over—under U.N. supervision, of course." He tried to hide a smile.

"Now!" Brown's shaggy eyebrows drew down sternly. "I sent your old buddy, Newsome, up to Greenland six months ago as my executive assistant. He flubbed it. Cracked up completely. Still in the hospital up there, I understand."

"Bill always was somewhat of a screw," Jack agreed. "Who's in charge now?"

"Major Courtney Smith." Brown's thick lips curled. "I don't like him. He's getting too big for his britches. Also I have a hunch he's doing a little backstabbing in my direction. That's why I'm sending you up there."

"You'll have to outrank Smith, of course. I'll promote you to colonel. Well, that's about it. Sergeant Schultz will

make out your transportation. Dismissed." He turned to the stack of reports on the desk, then turned back with a snarl.

"Don't try any of Smith's tricks up there, Harkness, and don't get chummy with your men!"

"Yes, sir." Jack retreated along the catwalk.

"What's eating His Nibbs?" he asked the girl in the outer office when she had finished making out his papers.

"Same thing that's eating you—induced egomania," she snipped and added, "About that date tonight. I don't think I can make it. And don't forget your hat."

CHAPTER VI

Termite Bait

THAT afternoon Colonel Harkness rocketed northward in a transport to a landing on an expanse of blizzard-swept ice only a few degrees from the Pole. In the light of the midnight sun the base resembled a limitless oil field. Tall pylons, topped with dimly-glowing atomic radiators, stalked across the landscape as far as the eye could reach.

Major Smith, swathed to the ears in an electrically heated suit, met the plane and hustled Jack through the howling storm to a sturdy building somewhat resembling a coal mine tippie.

There they boarded an elevator which dropped them into a city built at ground level beneath the thick cap of immemorial snows. Phones rang there. Signal lights flashed. Public address systems blared. Figures scurried about just as they did in the Army Building at New York.

"Quite a place," Jack commented to his escort.

"Think so, Colonel Harkness? I could tell you a few things."

"Don't!"

"Have it your way. Here's your quarters, colonel. Shall I have you called in the morning, sir?"

"At seven."

"Seven! But nobody here gets up at—"

"Seven!"

"Seven it is, colonel." Smith's depart-

ing comments were half audible.

The night shift was just coming in from the field when the new commandant started prowling the next day. The post *was* quite a place, he agreed with himself.

It was equipped with every mechanical gadget imaginable—automatic lifts, automatic theaters, automatic cafeterias. Only the sketchy breakfast menus displayed in the latter hinted that outside a world was dying of starvation. That, of course, would all be changed soon, his new-found sagacity told him.

Topside, when he got there, was even more impressive than he had expected from his previous glimpse of it. For scores of miles across the glaciers heavily swaddled engineers were jockeying bulldozers through the blizzard or setting up equipment to boost the power of the radiators. The output must be fantastic but this, he knew, was only the first of a hundred melting stations planned for Greenland.

He returned below to plunge into a routine which had no end. Up at dawn. Breakfast of black coffee and yeast cakes. Conferences until noon. Snatch a sandwich and more coffee. More detail work. Another miserable cafeteria meal. Back to the office again, most nights, until he could keep his eyes open no longer and staggered to bed.

Despite the grinding schedule, however, Jack rode the crest of a wave. He signed masses of papers which he fondly imagined he understood. On Brown's authority he directed his bulldozers, excavators and engineers like a master chess player.

He submitted his idea for heating the moisture-laden clouds which now hung low over the base and received a citation by return plane. When he just had to let down for a few hours he drank heavily and made love to beautiful WAC officers.

As the months shot by, though, his exultation began to wear thin. Sometimes, when he was nodding over a batch of reports, he had disturbing, meaningless glimpses of flashing crimson wings and hurtling suns. Sometimes he found himself yearning for the companionship of someone besides the strutting, roistering extroverts who crammed the base.

Sometimes he suspected that the

WACs were neither smart nor fascinating. At the end of the third month a curt note from Brown saying that his cloud-heating proposal had been disapproved "by higher authority" hit him squarely between the eyes.

The next morning he awoke in his chrome-decorated, antiseptic room to the brutally clear realization that, despite the billions being poured into Operation Arctic, it was far behind schedule.

Staring into the bathroom mirror as he shaved, he reassessed recent events. Smith and other subordinates had repeatedly disobeyed his orders. The mathematicians and would-be physicists he depended on for guidance had dropped needed studies on glacial slips to explore sidelines which they hoped might win them personal advancement.

The Canadians had not yet set up a single base and the Russians kept their own counsel. He was sure that Smith had stolen his latest WAC and was doublecrossing him with Brown.

Tears gathered in his brown eyes and his mouth corners turned down. Things which had appeared to be going swimmingly yesterday were really a mess. His work was a failure. Operation Arctic was a vast madhouse, run by madmen. He stared at the razor in his hand. Why not end it all?

It brought him up short. He was in a blue funk, he realized, only a few jumps from a manic depressive state. He hurled the razor into a disposal chute and dialed frantically for Brown.

The general stared blearily from the visor.

"Wazzamatter, Harkness?" he demanded. "Firs' sleep I've had in a week an' you—"

"I'm sorry, sir." Jack reddened. "I woke up with the jitters."

"Oh—that!" Brown positively leered. "I forgot. Your Routine's wearing off. Gives one the jumps o' mornings. Ask Psycho to give you another workout." He switched off.

The spaceman called the hospital, then paced the floor, gritting his teeth until the Psycho appeared. Somehow it did not surprise him that his visitor was the thin man who lisped.

"Ah, there, colonel. Having trouble?" He rubbed his beard briskly. "From the lookth of thingth I arrived juhth in

time. We'd better go to the hothpital for thith one."

"What's the matter with me?" Jack felt like jumping out of his skin.

"Nothing therious. Thuper-ego getting rethleth. Fich you up in no time. Come with me."

Dumbly, helplessly, he followed his mentor through corridors which seemed to expand and contract about him. A dope addict must feel this way, he thought in a lucid moment. He had gone a long way down since his return from—his return from—where?

He had disgraced the name of Harkness, that was what. Yes and he had disgraced General Brown. The Old Man would break him for this display of nerves. The hardened veteran of the spaceways wept in an agony of maudlin childish remorse. The Psycho smiled into his beard and let him weep.

The nurse on du'y in the hospital office evidently expected them. She led the way into a ward which was empty except for a poor devil who was moaning and struggling in a steaming bathtub which had a tight canvas cover.

"Don't mind him," cooed the Psycho. "We're giving him alternate inthulin thock and hydrotherapy treatment to cure a very theriouth malajuthment."

Jack glanced disinterestedly at the sweating face which showed above the canvas, then returned to a contemplation of his own symptoms.

"I'm dying," he moaned.

"Nonthenth. We all go through thith thometimeth. It ith the pryth we pay for leaderthip."

"For God's sake, can't you stop that lisping?"

"Well! I mutht thay! Thit down and be quiet now. We'll get you a thedative." He stamped out, followed by the nurse. Harkness hid his face in trembling hands.

"Jack! Jack Harkness."

He jerked erect to stare at the steaming tub, from which the whisper seemed to have come.

"Jack! The voice was stronger now. "Don't you remember me?"

"Who—who is it?" Memory was scratching like a mouse at his mind as he stared through the rising steam at a square-jawed face topped by limp ringlets of straw-colored hair.

"I'm Bill Newsome, Jack. Your old buddy. Try hard to remember. Polaris

three. Yahna. Pog. We've only a moment. Try to remember, Jack. It's all there if you just try hard enough."

Jack's mind filled with boiling purple mists. Purple mists? He struggled to pin the thought down. Through the mist came a flash of crimson. Wings! Yahna—Yahna, yes, and Bill—Bill Newsome teasing Pog. A curtain ripped somewhere, inundating his brain with blinding light. He staggered to his feet, then lunged for the tub and started tearing at its cover.

"No! Stop, Jack! It's too late for that. Grover and the nurse will be back in a minute or two with your hypo. Listen to me." His voice grated like a file.

"Yes. I'm listening."

"It's simple, really (I tried to fight them in the open. That's why I'm in this wash boiler.) You've got to pretend to go under. You've got to pretend to sleep. The way is not to listen to what he's saying. You know any involved math formulas? Foreign quotations? Stuff like that?"

"Yahna taught me some of that twitting Martian poetry."

"Good. Perfect. It's way off the beam. Keep saying it to yourself a mile a minute. Don't let him get a wedge in. Will yourself not to hear him. You can do it. Then keel over. Roll your eyeballs up. You're out like a light, see."

"Then comes the hard part. You'll have to fake replies as though you were under hypnotic compulsion. Maybe you can do that too. Afterward—well, I'm depending on you to get us both out of this—" Bill's words turned into a tortured moan and he was threshing like a seal when the Psycho returned.

GROVER pressed the needle home, set up his machine—a more complicated one this time—waited a few moments to let the sedative take effect and began his hypnotic rigmarole. Jack willed himself not to listen and not to focus his eyes on the spinning mirror. Soundlessly he began chanting an old Martian epic.

It was hard going. The hypo had blurred his faculties. Again and again he missed a note in the song—had to go back and scramble to pick up the melody. The jumble grew worse.

"Thleep. Thleeeeeeep."

He couldn't keep it up. He was sweating heavily and must be giving the ruse away.

"Thleep. Thweet thleep. Dreamleth thleep." That lisp made the words even more compelling. Grover was good! Good-bye Yahna. Good-bye.

Then, like the Conger eel, which always gives its drowning victim just one chance to escape, by shifting its grip, Grover made a slip.

"Tough cayth," he whispered to the nurse at his elbow. "Going under now, though, I think. Thleep. Thleep. Thleep."

Jack's mind snapped back into gear. He finished the song in a triumphant burst of mental music, then closed his eyes and reeled out of the chair.

The nurse eased him to the floor. The Psycho lifted one of his eyelids and grunted. They carried him to a bed.

"Are you athleep?"

"Yes."

"Can you hear me clearly?"

"Yes. I can hear you clearly."

Then, as Bill had predicted, the worst of the experience began.

Using all the tricks of free association, Grover gnawed at his mind like a termite. He slammed doors in it too or so he thought. He opened other doors which looked out on horrible things—things which he must have learned during their previous seance but which Jack's consciousness had never plumbed.

Good Lord! Had he once really been on the verge of committing deliberate murder at Marsport? Had he really hated his father? Had he toyed with that snide plot to induce Mary to compromise the Old Man? Might as well admit everything. Grover expected him to!

The spaceman was on his mental toes now. He thanked his stars that he had a good reading knowledge of Freud and his successors—that he had had those long arguments about good and bad psychiatry with Bill. As the Psycho left ground previously covered and started fishing for new information he feigned and faked his replies, feeling sick at his stomach as he did so.

Grover was after his Super-ego now, that relentless often stupid mentor built up ever since caveman days to keep the Ego in check. He shook it like a rat, ridiculed it, exorcised it, bound it with throngs of words.

In exchange he endeavored to build

up his patient's Ego to overweening proportions. He did that in the time-honored manner by taking Jack's mind to the top of a high mountain and showing it the world spread out like an oyster, ready for the taking by a cruel unamoral master hand.

It was a devilish business. Harkness recoiled at the evil vista but forced himself to make what seemed to be the proper enthusiastic replies. He had no idea of the impression he was creating since his eyes had to remain closed.

"Now thleep again—thleep deeply and awake free from fear of failure," the Psycho intoned at last. "You must obey my orderth alwayth. Otherwyth obey the impultheth of your Ego." Then to the nurse, "Keep him in bed for a few houth. He'th heading for a crack-up, I think, but he ought to be okay for another month or two."

Jack forced himself to breathe slowly and evenly though his thoughts were racing. What hideous plot had he uncovered? For some reason which he could not fathom, the Psychos were deliberately placing what was left of Earth at the mercy of a brood of little Caesars, of heartless, self-seeking third-class Hitlers and Mussolinis.

He must escape and somehow take Bill with him. The plot must fail. Better for the world to go back to barbarism once more than for man to live under the perpetual rule of hypnotized monsters.

He knew he must pretend to sleep dreamlessly for an hour at least. He risked a veiled glance at the nurse's wrist watch as she hovered about him, then began counting. That was the only way. He counted by sixties.

ONE Boy Scout flag. Two Boy Scout flags. Three Boy Scout flags. He remembered that trick from his youth. Sixty sixties at last. He opened his eyes, sat up, swung his legs over the side of the bed and beat his chest with he-man vigor.

"Feel all right, sir?" The nurse hovered again, steaming drink in hand.

"Fine. Splendid." He inhaled deeply. "May I get back to the office now? Lots of work to be done."

"Certainly. But take it a bit easy today." Her bovine eyes followed his long-legged figure admiringly as he stamped out.

Back in his office Jack let routine go hang while he tried to think things through. First came the idea of issuing an order for Bill's release. That wouldn't quite wash. The Psychos would check and discover too many things. Bill would have to be sprung.

After that? Where could a man be hidden who had been shocked and sweated to the verge of exhaustion? Perhaps some of the privates or non-coms who worked the bulldozers and heaters might hide them for a few hours in their quarters. They had not been Routined and their profane sotto voce remarks had convinced him that some of them hated the insides of the Psychos and their victims.

On the other hand, he had obeyed Brown's orders not to get chummy with subordinates and his martinettishness had not endeared him to them. A dead end there. To clear his head he donned his outdoor garments and went for an inspection tour of the surface.

In this particular sector of the "front", man's battle against the ice was progressing with fair success despite the near approach of winter. The air near the ground was well above freezing now, although frigid upper strata recondensed the rising moisture into heavy clouds, a pea-soup fog and gales compounded of freezing rain, snow and sleet.

The steady precipitation had slashed mammoth gullies through the icecap, some of them already reaching to the frozen soil which sparsely covered the old bones of Greenland. Down them frothing torrents were racing on their way to the sea.

As he sloshed farther and farther away from the base in the red-starred gloom Jack was forced to change course repeatedly to avoid the streams. For a time he kept his sense of direction by steering from one pylon to another.

But his mind was in turmoil and he had no clear idea of where he was heading or why. In half an hour he found himself not only soaked to the skin but lost. Well, it didn't really matter. He could get a hitch on a passing tractor, he decided.

That was the moment when the rotten snow on which he was standing chose to start slipping toward some hidden stream. He rolled down the cascading slope, fighting to secure a handhold.

Slippery ice splinters evaded his grasp. His gloves shredded and all feeling left his bleeding fingers. Maybe this was it.

CHAPTER VII

Flight!

HE brought up against an outcrop, lay there for several minutes, then inched his way to the control shack at the base of the nearest pylon.

"Don't you blokes even know enough to come in outta th' rain?" muttered the technician on duty, who was cradling a telephone receiver between shoulder and chin. Seeing Jack's eagles as he removed his dripping overcoat, the engineer softened a bit. "Sorry, Colonel Harkness. I'll help patch you up soon's I finish this blasted report."

After a few cryptic words into the phone he slammed it down with an oath.

"That was Major Smith's office," he snorted. "I tell 'em and tell 'em we're steppin' this thing up too fast. Several pylons are settlin'. Hell's gonna be poppin' in a week or two. Have they passed that info on to you, sir?"

"No. Not a word. But I should have seen it myself. I've been a fool."

"Yeah?" A delighted grin split the man's face. "Well, you're the first of the Routineers ever to admit it. The Psychos'll get you if you don't watch out."

"They almost got me today." On a hunch, Jack decided to force his luck. "I foxed them."

"You foxed 'em?" The grin froze.

"Faked a trance."

"The deuce you say. Didn't know it could be done or I'd have applied for a commission." Suspicion dawned and his eyes flickered.

"I'm on the level," Jack said quietly. "I'm really a spaceman. Got caught in this devil's web before I knew it. Now I want out."

"What do you expect me to do about it?"

"The Psychos are working over a friend of mine. I've got to get him away from them and hide him somewhere until he's strong enough to travel. I thought maybe you—"

"Fat chance. This is a come-on of some kind."

"See here, friend." Jack had gone too far to turn back now. "I know you belong to the League. The Psychos had me going for a while but now I'm on your side."

"If my buddy and I can get back to New York there's a slim chance we may be able to straighten out this mess. If you want to help, okay. If not, pick up that phone and report me."

"Um." The technician rose and pulled a first aid kit off the shelf. "Pretty nasty cut you've got on your cheek. Let me plaster it up a bit. Then, as he worked. "Who's your buddy?"

"Bill Newsome."

"Newsome!" A roll of adhesive tape thumped to the floor. "Is he still here?"

"Yes. At the hospital."

"Poor old Bill. He tried to butt his head against a stone wall. The Survivors told him it was no good but he wouldn't listen. Can you get him out?"

"I think so but he's going to need some rest before he can travel. Is there a hideout in the base?"

"Nuh-uh! They watch us like hawks in there. Your only chance is out here on the field. Since the weather has become so bad neither Smith's boys nor the Psychos come snooping as often as they used to."

"Tell you what. I'll caché some food here along with any other supplies I can lay hands on in a hurry. Then, if you come out, you should be able to lie low for a few hours at least. There'll be another tech on duty, probably, but he's all right."

"Thanks." Jack slipped back into his overclothes.

"Nothing to it. I like Newsome. Keep those three pylons there in line and you'll walk right back into base."

The colonel's knees were sagging with exhaustion after the return journey. The nurse regarded him with horror when he stumbled into the hospital.

"I told you—" she began angrily.

"Had to be done. Emergency. Got lost," he mumbled.

She forgot her anger, gave him a drink, stuck him under a shower and crisscrossed his cuts with antiseptic and tape.

"You ought to stay here tonight," she grumbled, "but I haven't a single room left. A lot of officers were Routed today."

"Stick me in the ward then. I can't walk another step."

"Well, I don't know. There's a fellow in there who gets violent at times. And I'll be so busy with the others I won't be able to—"

"He won't keep me awake, the way I feel."

"All right. Push the button, though, if he gets too wild."

JACK made no move to undress when she left him alone in the ward.

"Bill," he whispered.

No answer. The other was in coma. He tiptoed over to the bed and shook his friend until a spark of life returned.

"Owl!" Not recognizing the bandaged face above him, Newsome started to sob. "Leave me alone," he pleaded.

"Leave me alone, can't you."

"It's Jack—Jack Harkness."

"You're a liar." He was half-delirious. "Harkness is on Polaris."

"No. I'm right here. Can you walk if I help you?"

"A little." The psychologist was getting a grip on himself. "Maybe half a block. I'm weak as a cat."

"We'll make it," Jack started stuffing the sick man into his clammy overclothes.

They slipped out of the hospital without attracting attention. But, as they moved along the corridor, it became plain why no guard had been placed over Newsome. His feet dragged pitifully and he leaned more and more heavily on his friend's arm.

"Don't think—I can make it," he breathed at last.

"Buck up. My office is only another hundred yards or so. Here. Put your

arm over my shoulders."

Then the worst happened. Major Smith came around a corner and blocked their path. He was walking with meticulous care, as though he had had a few too many drinks.

"Sing!" gritted Harkness. "It's our only chance."

Obediently, Bill piped up with a few cracked bars of *Sweet Adeline*.

"Boy! What a load he's got," grinned the major. "Who is he, anyway? Haven't I—?"

"He's a new captain Brown sent down," Jack cut in. "Must have smuggled a bottle onto the plane."

"What happened to you, by the way?"

"Went up to meet him and the storm bowled me over. Say, can you help me carry this stinker to his room? He's out on his feet."

"Sorry, old fellow. Have to get some shuteye myself. Big day tomorrow." Smith swaggered on.

"If the nurse doesn't do it first Smith'll sound the alarm when he sobers up enough to remember who I am," said Bill. "You'd better chuck me back in the hospital. Say you caught me trying to escape or something."

"Shut up. I've found a hideout."

"You don't know the Psychos. I tried to hide, too. They smelled me out in no time."

"Don't worry. Get in here." He half-carried, half-dragged Newsome into his empty office. "Throw a drink into yourself. There's some so-called food in the refrigerator. I'll forage for a uniform."

Jack returned with two mechanic's coveralls, a pair of electrified outer suits and a heavy duty Ultra Heat. Bill

[Turn page]

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had finished the food by this time and was feeling much stronger. He was able to walk unassisted to the elevator, which shot them to the surface.

The outer guard made no objection when they chose a light high-speed crawler—descendant of the ancient duk or duck—climbed into it and roared off into the darkness. They should have had passes but—the sentry yawned and went back to his game of solitaire.

They cached the duck in an ice ravine near the fourth pylon and slipped and slid to the control shack. Another tech greeted Bill with a whoop of delight, pounding him on the back until he showed signs of flying apart.

"Good to see you again," gasped the sick man, "but take it easy, Hank. I'm nine parts corpse."

"I've got your stuff," said Hank. "You can hole up here till the alarm goes. Then you'll have to scam."

"What's the best way to do that?" Jack wanted to know.

"Well, you can't use a plane. They'd get a radar fix on you in no time flat. If you had a cat—"

"We have one outside."

"Good. Then you'll just have to head south and pray."

"What about gasoline?"

"The League has an underground railroad," Bill explained.

"Sure has," the tech agreed. "I've got your 'tickets' and a map. You've a fifty-fifty chance of sneaking through. Now you'd better get what sleep you can. My relief will wake you when the alarm goes."

They piled blankets on the floor and made themselves as comfortable as possible. Six hours later a new engineer shook them awake.

"Better shove off," he said. "Major Smith is on the warpath. You have about an hour before they get the patrol cats out this far. I put your stuff in the duck. Don't answer any challenge. Shoot first."

He bundled them out into the blizzard and wrung their hands fiercely in farewell.

THEY cut straight southward through the midst of the field, splashing in and out of the ravines at the risk of broken necks.

Once they were challenged by a heavy

cat. It went out of control and turned over when Bill fused its right tread with the Ultra Heat. Eventually they broke free of the chopped-up half-melted ice and streaked across unsullied hard-packed snow beyond the influence of radiators.

The stars came out and Jack felt a pang of homesickness as he reset his course by Polaris. Forty light years away but it seemed that he could almost reach up and touch it.

Eight hours later they reached a fur trader's hut which their map showed to be the farthest north station on the underground railway.

The bearded factor made them stacks of steaming sourdough flapjacks and brewed a pot of black coffee. He filled their tank from a hidden drum and waved them on their way.

"Offshore ice pretty smooth as far as Etah," he grunted.

They arrived at the few shacks which marked Etah in a more-dead-than-alive state. They slept there and also abandoned the duck. Another trapper, as garrulous as his predecessor had been taciturn, ferried them across Baffin Bay and Island in his pontoon-rigged plane.

Watching the endless snows unrolling beneath them, Jack was astonished that he could ever have been swept away by the dream of melting the Polar icecap. Even with the power of the atom the task would require scores of years.

"It's not only that so much power is being wasted," Bill said. "Even if they should succeed in melting any great portion of the cap do you know what would happen?"

"My fur business, she go plumb to 'ell." The pilot grinned.

"Worse than that. The Earth would be thrown 'way off balance because the weight of the Antarctic cap would remain. Its axis would start wobbling like that of a badly balanced top.

"Eventually the globe would tip. The Poles would shift, probably to somewhere near where the Equator now is. That would doom what is left of the human race."

"What's the solution, Bill?"

"The obvious common sense things. The things the League keeps yelling for. Rigid control of the world's birth rate. Reforestation. Distillation of sea water. Putting back into the land a bit more than we take out of it each year. It

would be a long haul. Probably half of the earth's present population would die of starvation before we got our feet firmly on the road back."

"Anything being done along those lines?" asked the factor.

"Not any more. The Psychos are betting their whole pile of chips on this one scheme. When it fails there'll be no time to start over."

"Is everybody crazy?" Jack wanted to know.

"No, most of them are just ignorant and psychologically unbalanced. You see, the ecologists—the men who understood soil—were killed in the crackup. They were in there pitching when the dust hit. They hadn't a chance. About the only scientific brains left were those of the physicists. So, when the Psychos took over, they naturally turned to them for a solution."

"Port Nelson down below," interrupted the fur trader. "Flying she not good south of here."

They landed on a snow-packed runway well to the north of the village and found another ship awaiting them. No questions were asked.

The underground was functioning quite smoothly. Their pilot, they noticed, had two passengers waiting to return with him.

They now skirted a dreary landscape of cutover pine and hemlock, frozen muskeg and occasional rivers as a pimply-faced youngster hedge-hopped them along the southwestern shore of Hudson's Bay to a hidden field near Moosonee.

Twice they thought they had been spotted by Canadian Army planes, but each case was a false alarm.

AT Moosonee they were given a duck again and in it they plunged into the heart of the gutted forests. There was plenty of time to talk now and Bill expanded his theories. Despite the hardships of the journey he was gaining strength with every passing day and seemed to want to make up for his months of enforced silence.

"The Psychos are pretty smart," he said one night when they were encamped by a vast mudhole which had been a crystal lake not many years before. "Many of them are honest too."

"They figured it this way, I think—if the best brains left in the world could

work at full capacity and without hindrance from inhibitions and inferiority complexes they might forge ahead. They might undo the damage which had been done by bickering politicians and shortsighted business men.

"So, they reasoned, if they could suppress the Super-ego, they allow man to use his abilities as he had never done before. But what happened?"

"Search me, Bill," Jack was roasting a scrawny rabbit over a fire of charred brush. "You're the psychologist."

"Well, as I see it, they did three things they hadn't counted on. First, since they couldn't kill the Super-ego, they found they had merely exchanged man's age-old burden of suppressed desires for a suppressed Super-ego. They had to organize strong-arm squads to keep the old boy under. That, in turn, set them on the road which leads to dictatorship.

"Second, they found that when they chained the Super-ego they freed not only the Ego, the thing they were after, but they also turned loose the id. The id, which might be compared either to a precocious genius or to the savage within us, crawled right out of the cellar of the mind and threatened to steal the show.

"It didn't care a whoop about melting the Arctic ice although it probably knew how to do so. It wanted a steak for supper, a pretty girl to chase, a good bloody fight every so often and to heck with the consequences."

"Yes," Harkness brushed ashes off the rabbit carcass, chopped it in two with a jack knife and gave each of them a portion. "That's the way I felt at first. That is also, I suspect, the way Brown and Smith feel."

"Check. Boy, this tastes good after the yeast. And that brings us to the third point. By taking the wraps off the id and the Ego the Psychos released a whale of a lot of animal spirits. It was sort of like taking the flywheel off a motor and letting her rip. But fireworks are a poor substitute for disciplined grey matter, even if it is inhibited.

"In fact, old Aristotle thought that the mind was only a cool sponge whose sole function was to keep down man's animal spirits. Maybe he was right about that although he really got us into the jam with that theory of his that

ideas could be sorted into separate boxes."

"What do you propose to do about it?"

Jack licked his fingers and wished for another rabbit.

"We've got to get man's Super-ego out of hock."

"And be right back where we started from."

"Not necessarily. I think the Psychos made the initial mistake by tinkering with one part of the mind at the expense of the other two. The Super-ego has its function. Half the advice it gives us is cockeyed because it's based on superstitions and taboos which man should have outgrown when he crawled out of the cave. But the other half is based on good common sense. It kept man from making a terrible fool of himself."

"Then you would suppress the Ego and the id."

"No." Bill poked at the dying fire and his ugly face took on a faraway look. "No, I'd strive for some sort of synthesis between the three parts of the mind—the id, with its brilliance, its racial memories, probably its telepathic powers—the Ego, with its organizing ability and its pride in man's destiny—the Super-ego to bump the heads of the other two together occasionally. Then we'd have something! We'd be supermen."

"SOUNDS simple." Jack yawned.

"How do you go about it?"

"I think the Pogs know part of the answer."

Jack snorted. "The Pogs?"

"The Pog to be exact."

"But I'm sure they have no Egos at all. They have no ambition. You don't seriously suggest that we take them for models?"

"Of course not. But I'd like to talk to them—to it—anyway."

Jack jumped as if stung.

"Not a bad idea," he cried. "I'd been wondering where we'd hide when and if we got back to New York. Maybe we could duck through the teleport. How about it?"

"Perhaps we could." Bill was wrapping his blankets around him. "If we ever get near the Army Building, which I doubt."

CHAPTER VIII

Touch and Go

THEY struck the edge of the dust bowl a hundred miles north of Ottawa. There they exchanged their duck for a less conspicuous 1990 model Ford and limped on over roads which had been almost obliterated by the yellowish drifts.

Most of the countryside had been abandoned. Houses leaned crazily, their foundations undermined. Fences were either flat or perched high on the tips of their exposed posts. A few jack-rabbits and an occasional starving cow roamed among the dunes and nibbled at the sparse bunch grasses.

Once, near a ruined village, a shrieking boy of twelve or so sprinted across the road ahead of them. Close behind him pelted three living skeletons in tatters. Jack stepped on the gas while Bill snapped a flash from the Ultra Heat between pursued and pursuers. The skeletons shook gaunt fists in which knives gleamed before they ducked into some underbrush.

"Poor kid," said Bill. "Hope he gets away. Not pretty is it—cannibalism."

Here and there groups of hollow-eyed farmers clung to land near the course of dry streams or around the edges of half-empty lakes. A few of the places maintained some traces of civilization and in them were located the gasoline dumps of the "railroad."

Other places were dying by inches. Usually their inhabitants rocked on their tumbledown front porches and eyed the travelers with apathy born of starvation. Several times, however, they tried to stop the car and were held at bay only by the Ultra Heat. After one near thing, in which Jack received a nasty bullet graze on the upper arm, the refugees decided to do the rest of their traveling at night.

Suspecting that the international bridges might be guarded they easily forded the St. Lawrence near Brockville and continued onward over back roads in a growing haze which made headlights almost useless. The countryside here looked a little better than it had farther north but dust clouds roll-

ing in from the plains states finally forced them to cover their noses with damp cloths. In many places they had to make wide detours where erosion had undermined the pavement.

Despite these handicaps they managed to work their way into New Jersey and began to congratulate themselves on escaping the Psychos. Then the inevitable happened. At a ruined cloverleaf near the Newark Airport a squad of motorcycle troops swarmed through the dust and surrounded the car. There was no opportunity to run or even fight.

"Nice trip, boys?" The lieutenant in charge of the squad removed his goggles and rubbed the grime off them. "General Brown's waiting up for you."

He signaled to his men. They formed a tight cordon around the ancient auto. Sirens screaming, they escorted it across the gasping countryside, through the Lincoln Tunnel and to the doors of the Army Building.

"I was mistaken," Bill smiled crookedly as they alighted. "We got here after all."

Sergeant Schultz, who was just coming on duty, showed no sign of emotion when the pair were ushered in.

"Ah'll pick up yoah pieces when they fly through th' doah," She smirked. Then she lowered one eyelid ever so slightly.

Brown must have been in a towering rage for so long that even his boundless energy had become exhausted. He greeted them more in sorrow than in anger and flapped one hand to dismiss the lieutenant. The gesture did not succeed in dismissing the thin-bearded Psycho who stood beside his desk.

"Well, boys, I'll give you just one more chance," the old man said. He had aged ten years since their last meeting, Jack realized with a start. "If you'll take your treatments and promise to keep on taking them I'll hush this up and send you back to work. We need you up there—need you bad. Is that right, Dr. Grover?"

"That it's right, general."

"If you don't promise to behave—well, I guess it's a court martial and euthanasia."

"But, sir," Jack tried to argue, "Operation Arctic is a failure. We haven't the forces or the time to melt such quantities of ice. The pylons are buck-

ling already as erosion sets in. The Canadians haven't started yet and the Russians apparently have given it up as a bad job."

"And even if it should succeed it would tip the earth off axis." This from Bill.

"True or false?" Brown asked the Psycho.

"Faith. Every word of it. I've been up there and I know. These men are saboteurs, members of the League. Major Smith report—"

"Yes, yes. I know what Major Smith reports ad nauseum." Brown rose shakily. He half-stretched out his hands in a last appeal, then thought better of it and pressed a button instead.

"Take them to the guard house," he ordered when the lieutenant reappeared. "Court martial at fourteen thirty today."

"Gee, it was good to see her again," sighed Bill as he flopped down on the lower bunk of their cell.

"See who again?" Jack had been thinking of Yahna while there was still time.

"Schultzie. She's a grand person, once you get to know her."

"Yeah. Yeah, she is that." Conversation languished.

IT was Sergeant Schultz who disturbed their solitude an endless hour later.

"Lo, jailbirds," she quipped with a sidelong smile at the sentry who had admitted her. "The Old Man wants to know if you've changed your minds. There are promotions in it if you do—and a bit of graft too, I understand."

"Don't kid, Mary," snapped Bill.

"Well, you're a long time dead. Don't say I didn't warn you." She gripped the cell window bars and shook them angrily. "Men are such idiots!" Then, in a fierce whisper. "Take 'em quick. They're set."

Bill looked blank but Jack lunged forward.

"Take it easy, Schultzie," he said, putting his hands over hers. "We've got a pull with Grover."

"Well, I hope it's a strong one." She snatched her hands away. "If not, I'll see you in the gas chamber." She stormed down the hall.

"Crazy kid," grinned the sentry as he appreciated her rear view. "For a

mo' I thought she was going to punch you. Boy. I wish—" He hummed a snatch of song instead of completing the sentence.

Fourteen o'clock brought a guard of eight soldiers.

Jack's mind was racing as they headed for the courtroom. He and Bill were wearing Mary's energizers, safely hidden under the sleeves of their tunics. A touch would start them operating. But then what? They would have to wait for a clue.

He expected the usual court martial with plenty of brass in attendance. Instead the room was empty except for Brown, Grover and eleven other Psychos, all in black. They clustered like vultures awaiting dinner.

The general declared the court martial in session, then glared at the prisoners.

"The charges are treason, disobedience of orders and desertion," he growled. "Have either of the prisoners anything to say in their defense?"

"Yes, sir," Jack retorted. "This court martial is not properly constituted. Since we are commissioned officers this court should consist of five of our superiors, a judge advocate and a defense counsel. These — er — gentlemen have no standing here and should be expelled."

Brown snorted and fidgeted. "This is a summary court martial, *Sergeant Harkness*," he said at last. "I am the only officer needed."

"In that case, you ~~cannot~~ try us for treason. Treason is a capital offense."

"Humph! Have you nothing to say in your defense?"

"Plenty. But not in front of those birds of prey."

"In that case—" The general hesitated. Grover whispered at him. At first Brown shook his grizzled head stubbornly. Then he wilted.

"In that case," he mumbled, "this summary court martial has no recourse but to find Sergeants John Harkness and William Newsome guilty of disobedience of orders and desertion. The verdict of the court is—" He looked at them miserably.

"The verdict of the court is that they be confined to an insane asylum for the rest of their natural lives."

"Hey!" Bill started forward but was stopped by the bayonets of two guards.

"Perfectly legal, sir," Jack sneered. "Hitler couldn't have done better. May I congratulate your Psy—"

A piercing scream chopped him off. Sergeant Schultz, disheveled, dirty and with a revealingly ripped blouse, stood at the door of the courtroom.

"The Survivors," she wailed. "They're attacking! They're downstairs—in the corridors—fighting their way up. I—"

The rest was drowned in indescribable confusion. Brown shouted orders. Grover countermanded them. The eleven other Psychos twittered and stampeded. The gaping soldiers relaxed their vigilance. As the excitement reached its peak, Mary beckoned imperiously—and vanished in a cloud of corruscating sparks.

"Zero Hour," grunted Jack. He pressed the stud of his energizer and sprinted for the door.

One of the guards, who retained some presence of mind, tried to bar the exit. As the spaceman catapulted into him he staggered back, yelling and shielding his face with upflung arms.

"This way!" Mary's voice rang out.

"Are the Survivors attacking?"

"With what? Brickbats? Don't talk. Run before you burn a hole through the floor."

JACK plunged down well-remembered corridors. Before him, little puffs of smoke from the floor and the stink of scorched linoleum gave him his only clue to the girl's whereabouts. Looking back once, he saw other puffs behind him and knew that Bill followed.

The energizer, he realized, must be set for the infra-red band—and it must be radiating outward only. Otherwise they would have been roasted to cinders long before this. Good old Mary. Her tinkering had paid off.

Alarm sirens were screaming as they plunged into the large room filled with mysterious apparatus where Jack had encountered the harried cadet on his return from Polaris three. A squad was tugging at the fire doors but the trio squeezed through before they slammed shut.

All hell broke loose, however, when they entered the generator room. To the clangor of the general alarm was added the screech of smaller signals. Warning lights flashed. Dial needles jumped. Jack felt his temperature skyrocket.

"What's the matter?" Mary panted. "I'm roasting."

"Switch off your energizers quick!" Bill's voice cut in. "We're getting a backlash of radiation from the generators. We'll blow every fuse in the building." The psychologist's angular form materialized and the others followed suit. Thereupon the stereo-comic-reading guard yelped in terror and grabbed for his gun.

They jammed themselves through the door to the teleport room and got it closed behind them. Almost immediately its metal began to glow red as the guard turned his weapon on it.

"We've got three minutes at most before that door goes down," Jack shouted. "Follow me." He headed for the fifth catwalk, hurdling piles of debris as he went and praying that the others did not break their necks.

The standby light of the Polaris three port was glowing steadily when he reached it, showing that its fuses had not been damaged. He jerked open the round cover, then stopped as if struck. There was room inside for two people . . . if they imitated sardines in a can. By no stretch of the imagination could three make the trip at one time.

"Get in, you two," he ordered. "I'll hold 'em off till you're over."

"Get in yourself," snapped Bill. "Yahna's waiting for you."

"Dopes!" Mary's face was white but her voice was firm. "If there's any hope for Earth, it lies with you two. I'm excess baggage. As Lady Macbeth said, 'Stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once!'"

"But—"

"I know a few other tricks with the energizer," she said fiercely. "And if you're worrying about what the Psychos will do—don't. The Old Man can't get along without me. I'm the only one who can make sense out of his files."

"But you're sure to be Routed at best," Bill argued.

"So what? Are you jealous of what my libido will do when it's on the loose? Shame on you. Scram!"

She shoved them into their cubbyhole, slammed the door and pressed the main power switch home just as a swarm of yelling soldiers poured into the room. She squared her thin shoulders and walked toward the invaders, swaying her hips provocatively.

CHAPTER IX

According to Pog

POG wriggled with joy after he dragged the refugees out of the choking, overloaded port. Yahna enfolded Jack and Bill in her wings and crooned to them as only Martians can. Despite the fact that an electronic storm was raging outside the station, things inside got back to something like normal after an hour or so and they held a council of war.

"Nwa," Bill began as he put finishing touches to the first decent meal he had had in months. "Ah thig—"

"Not polite talk with full mouth," admonished Pog as he set before them another platter heaped with strawberries from the 'ponic gardens.

"Sorry, old boy," the psychologist answered after swallowing. "If you had been living on a thousand calories a day you wouldn't be so squeamish. So the 'ponics came through. All this stuff tastes like nectar and ambrosia. Yes, I will have another helping, thank you."

"What I was trying to say was that, if Earth is to be helped, we'll have to work fast." Briefly he outlined the situation. Yahna interrupted with innumerable questions. Pog listened but said nothing as he cleared away the dishes.

"Why you want help foolish Earth people?" he asked when the table was finally clear. As if to underscore his question the station walls trembled and its triple windows rattled as a mushrooming pillar of light blossomed several miles out on the plain.

"Why?" Bill's fist clenched. "Because we terrestrials are pretty decent, down at bottom. We've got ourselves in an awful jam by overdeveloping our technology at the expense of ecology, sociology and the other basic humanities. Then, while we were taking an awful beating from the dust demon we had raised, those confounded Psychos got a grip on us. I think we deserve another chance."

"Nature give mighty few second chance. Consider dinosaur."

"Maybe so. But we aren't dinosaurs. We've got good brains when we learn to use them. We need one more break and I have a hunch—that's a message

from my id, you know—that the Pog can give it to us. How about going down and helping straighten things out?"

"Pog no go." The creature actually shook inside and out at the thought of leaving its forbidding planet. "Pog stay home. Mind own business."

"Then tell us what to do," Jack ventured. "Bill is convinced you are an id, Pog. You have neither Super Ego nor Ego yet you get along fine. Perhaps, if the human Ego were suppressed too people could—"

He stopped in astonishment. Pog had drawn itself to its full height and was vibrating like a violin string with . . . yes, with anger as the thunder rumbled outside.

"Pog not id. Pog not id! Id do what it please. Pog do what it will!"

"All right. Pardon us," Bill cut in. "We didn't mean to insult you. Here's another idea. If the human id, Ego and Super-Ego could be unified and all of them brought to the level of consciousness the whole problem could be solved. Then we could behave like rational beings and still keep our primitive emotions in check. Could that be done, somehow, Pog? Maybe you work like that."

"Could." Pog scratched a diamphamous nose, meditated and added. "No good for humans."

"Why on earth not?" This from Yahna.

"Bill tell one time how Roman Republic fall. Have three boss."

"Do you mean the First Triumvirate?" The psychologist stared.

"Long word no good. Rome have three boss. All equal. All stupid. All jealous. Nothing happen. Enemy have one boss. Enemy come. Win. Then Caesar come. Be Roman boss."

"Roman history in one easy lesson." Jack had to smile. "So?"

"Take plenty long time blend human id, Ego, Super-Ego into one big boss like Pog have—like this." He placed their last hoarded bottle of Scotch on the table.

"Ummm! That makes sense," Bill agreed as he filled their glasses. "Well, confound it, what do you suggest?"

"Must educate Super-Ego. Then make him boss again."

"Fine. But how do we go about doing it?" Bill gulped the Scotch.

"Pog not know. Think maybe so Yahna know."

"Yahna?" It was Jack's turn to stare. "She hasn't been on Earth in years. She doesn't know the problem. And we haven't much time. If I'm not mistaken the Psychos will come piling through that teleport in a few hours with blood in their eyes and Ultra Heats in their fists."

"They can't let us escape, knowing what we know, but they can't send Routineers to bring us in. For all they know Routineers might go haywire in this environment."

"Why not destroy the teleport then?" Bill leaped to his feet.

"And leave Mary in the lurch? Cut ourselves off from any chance of returning home?"

"Of course not." The psychologist looked as if he had been kicked in the stomach. "Strike that idea off the record. We'll fight."

"No." Yahna's voice was like a combination of woodwinds. "When the Psychos come we must welcome them."

THE men stared as if she had gone crazy. Pog's insides wriggled with approval.

"Welcome them! They'll come shooting. And we won't be able to shoot back for fear of destroying the 'port. They'll have that figured out in advance." Jack's face was black with anger.

"Pog fix." The little fellow spoke with confidence but his body was positively twittering with excitement.

"Wine them and dine them," Yahna persisted serenely. "Perhaps their surprise can win us their friendship. Else everyone dies!"

"Of all the tom-fool ideas!" As had happened many times in the past Jack found himself being unreasonably irritated by Yahna's boundless naïveté. "Your scheme can't possibly work but even if it could I'd as soon make friends with a nest of rattlers."

"Yahna know." Pog's "hands" emitted a dry, rasping sound as he rubbed them together. "Yahna mighty fine girl. More smart than Pog."

"But will the 'ponics provide enough food for us to spread feasts?" Bill objected. "When I left—"

"'Ponic plenty fine now. Provide food for many feast."

"Then I think Yahna's idea might be

worth a try," the psychologist reluctantly agreed. "Even if we shoot the first Psychos without damaging the 'port those who are left on Earth have only to destroy the channel and we're stranded forever. And we have nothing better to suggest. What can we lose?"

So it was that when Grover and another Psycho crawled out of the teleport, loaded for bear, they emerged to find Pog, dressed baggily in one of Bill's uniforms, engaged in loading a big table with dishes of steaming vegetables and fresh fruits.

"Who're you?" barked the leader, leveling his weapon and trying to keep his eyes off the food.

"Me Pog." The creature turned toward the invaders a face which had been thickly powdered by Yahna into some resemblance to flesh.

"Where are the humanth?"

"They safe. You not catch."

For answer Grover fired from the hip!

Pog's uniform blazed and dissolved under that invisible lance of radiation. For a moment he was surrounded by wisps of smoke. Then he stood there, serene, naked and smiling.

Goggling, Grover bore down on the trigger. His companion followed suit. Pog staggered and swayed. His pointed teeth gritted. But he did not fall though a corruscating nimbus surrounded him and the room became suffocating with reflected radiation.

The Psychos were sweating and choking by the time the weapons guttered out, their power exhausted.

Pog stumbled forward and took the guns from their limp hands.

"You hungry, maybe so?" he panted, pointed at the table.

Then Yahna, looking like Ceres and Proserpine rolled into one, swept through the door to welcome the visitors.

"So glad you could come," she gushed before they could rally their faculties. "We were just having dinner. We hope you can join us."

"Well," Grover stared down at his empty, useless hands. "Well—"

"We are unarmed," said Jack as he and Bill entered the room.

"Well," Grover looked at his companion but the latter had eyes only for the food—more food than he had seen at one time in years.

"Let's make a truce—before the meal gets cool," Bill offered.

"In that cayth—" The Psycho was still suffering from shock, so that his gnawing hunger became almost overpowering. "In that cayth—I don't mind if we do." He allowed Yahna to escort him to a chair while Bill and Jack did the same for his drooling companion.

Pog withdrew to adjust the overburdened air-conditioning unit and to don another uniform. Then he returned to serve the meal with faultless aplomb. Neither of the guests was allowed to do more than ply knife, fork and spoon. Plates were kept heaped with luscious new potatoes, beets, yars, roasting ears, beans, and then various kinds of berries until no one could swallow another mouthful.

"Well," said Grover once more as he loosened his belt, "we thought we would meet rethithanth here. Didn't dream of anything like thith." He glanced at his watch and added reluctantly. "We ought to be getting back. We left orderth that if we did not return in three hourth the teleport channel would be cut."

"You were very brave to come here," Bill smirked.

"Glad to have had you." Yahna sounded like a Newport hostess. "Come again. Do."

"Sorry we had no meat," said Jack. "We're working on that now."

"But we're thending you back to Earth." Grover looked worried.

"Oh, come now! Just when we're starting to make progress here. If we stop now the whole project will fail. If you leave us here we ought to be exporting food to you in a few months."

GROVER straightened himself imperiously, as though about to give an order. Then he slumped and tugged uncertainly at his beard.

"Look, Doctor." Jack was now playing the game for all it was worth. "You Psychos have a strenuous life. You need a substantial diet. Until we're in a position to start exporting why don't you come through the 'port and dine with us whenever you need a square meal?"

"Yes." Bill beamed as Pog passed around glasses of homemade wine. "And if you'll send us the equipment to set up several more 'ports and to enlarge our 'ponics, we'll be glad to en-

tertain some of your associates. It gets mighty lonesome out here and we like good conversation."

"Well—" Grover blinked sleepily. "It might be arranged. Don't you think tho, Dr. Anthony?"

"Yes," said Anthony, licking his fingers and making his one contribution of the day to good conversation.

"One thing," said Bill. "I hope you won't be too hard on Sergeant Mary Schultz. There's no real harm in her."

"Of courth not. Of courth not." Grover was feeling expansive, both figuratively—and figuratively. "Have to be Routined, naturally, but no other dithapline will be needed. Couldn't get along without her. Well— We mutht get back before deadline. We bid you a very good evening. Come along, Dr. Anthony."

They were tucked back in the 'port and surrounded with good things from the gardens.

"But they're only for you Psychia-trists," Yahna warned archly.

"After all, we can't feed all of New York just yet," Bill added.

"Thertainly," Grover responded out of the darkness. "Thith ith too important to get out of our handth."

"Or out of our thtomakth!" snarled Jack as the door clicked home and the power drain dimmed the station lights. "Now will somebody tell me the purpose of that mummery, for the love of Mike? I had all I could do to keep from smashing in their smug faces. Brrrrr!"

"We should win friends and influence people!" Yahna swooped to the ceiling and kicked her trim heels with delight. "Come down here. Psychos aren't people."

"Jack no philosopher." Pog was giving a ghastly exhibition as he washed the powder off of his body. "Too bad."

* * * * *

Weeks passed. The station's original function was practically forgotten. It became an interstellar boarding house! As new equipment was installed more and more Psychos kept dropping in for meals. Since New York was World Headquarters for the group, Grover was always bringing new colleagues with him whenever they were in town.

The dining table had to be enlarged until it filled most of the room. Often Jack wandered out to the expanded and burgeoning gardens to marvel that their

supply could keep up with demand. Once Pog found him out there and rubbed his "hands" together in silent amusement.

"Why do you keep on playing the role of our cook, butler and chief bottle washer," the spaceman asked. "Don't you have anything better to do?"

"Pog study," was the answer. "Most interesting."

There was an odd note in his voice that set Jack wondering again. Was there one Pog which served them so selflessly. Or, perhaps, did an endless series of Pogs dance attendance at the station? He had no way of knowing.

There might be a hundred—a thousand—of the diaphanous creatures within a hundred yards and his eyes could never detect them. Perhaps those hosts had absorbed the power of Grover's guns.

The Psychos took to holding their important international conferences at the station. They waxed sleek as the months passed. In fact Grover finally insisted that they restrain their appetites somewhat in order that their plumpness should not arouse suspicion among less fortunate earthlings.

"Ith a great ekthperienth to come out here," the not-so-thin leader beamed one night. "Tho peathful. Tho relakthing. All of my colleagth agree with me on thith."

"All of them, sir?" inquired Pog. He had become an old friend to the visiting Psychos by this time. Oddly enough he never used "shorthand" when talking to them.

"Yeth. Every one of them. They've all dined here at one time or another before they returned to their pothth all over the world."

"In that case, sir," smiled the Polar-ian, "there's no need for you to keep up appearances any longer. Why don't you just relax and make yourself comfortable?"

"A splendid suggestion," said Grover with perfect enunciation. He sat down on the floor, removed his shoes and began playing contentedly with his toes.

IT was Mary Schultz who broke the news to them when she bounced out of the teleport a few hours later.

"It's wonderful," she gasped, after Bill had kissed her almost to exhaus-

tion. "The Psychos, you know. They've turned into puling idiots."

"Ids," said Yahna quietly.

"And something else has happened," the WAC raced on. "They must have changed the Routine all around. The Old Man—you wouldn't know him, really—tried to tell me about it but I'm awfully dumb."

"He says that somehow the Psychos stopped suppressing the Super-Ego months ago. Instead they—well, they began *educating* it. Showed it the foolishness of a lot of its cave-man prejudices. Made it into a sort of bang-up, educated streamlined twenty-first century Super-Ego, don't you know?"

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute." Jack shook her arm frantically. "Start all over again."

"Well, it's like the *old* Super-Ego told the Ego that, since cave-men had to store food against the winter, modern men have to make a million dollars. The new Super-Ego says 'tain't so—that men have to cooperate or capitulate. And as for those funny old sex taboos. *Well!*'"

"Hey!" This from an agitated Bill. "Have the Psychos been trying any of this new stuff on you?"

"Heavens no. My Routine wore off months ago but I've been so busy winding up Operation Arctic that nobody has dared come near me. In other words, Bill darling, I'm still unsullied."

"Wonderful. But what's this about winding up Operation Arctic?"

"Oh, that's been cancelled for a coon's age. We're doing the job the way it ought to be done now. Reforestation, shelter belts, planes sowing grasses to tie the *dust* down—you wouldn't believe *what's* been accomplished."

"And the Psychos," Yahna prompted.

"They've been *marvelous*. They dug up all sorts of stuff out of their own unconsciousness—stop me, somebody!" She gasped for breath. "You know. Ancestral memories of where to find new deposits of raw materials. Nuclear formulas we all thought had been lost but which one or the other of them had read or heard somewhere and subconsciously remembered. And then—" She giggled hysterically.

"And then?" They all leaned forward tensely.

"And then a few hours ago the Psychos all began acting like—like that!"

She pointed at Grover, who was still counting his toes.

Then her eyes lifted to two bearded gentlemen who were engaged in the last rounds of a pillow fight in one of the bedrooms.

Finally they rested on a fellow who had made a glimmering machine out of forks, knives, spoons, toothpicks and breadcrumbs and was sending it zooming in pursuit of a one-winged fly.

"WHAT happen then?" Pog's voice had a trace of anxiety.

"Oh, the Old Man got smart. Asked leaders of the Survivors to work with him. Things are going along without a hitch. I figured you folks had something to do with the change so I came through to tell you about it."

"Thanks a million, Mary," said Jack. Then, turning to Pog, "You old son of a gun. Feeding us stuff from the 'ponics and *them* your own food fixed up to look and taste like ours. Then giving them post-hypnotic suggestions until they had all been treated. But why didn't you let us in on it?"

"Yahna say no. Say all men naive. Give show away."

"Uh." Jack tried to grin at his feathered friend. "Maybe she was right at that. But what shall we do with those?" He motioned toward the ex-Psychos. One of them had another on the floor now and was mauling the daylight out of him.

"Leave here," beamed the little fellow. "Send others. Pog think, maybe so, the proper study of Pogkind is—Man."

Yahna smiled at them, then turned to the window and stared out at the endlessly dancing shadows of Polaris. She was humming the lines of an old poem which she had set to music.

"They sat them down upon the yellow sand

Between the sun and moon upon the shore,

And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,

Of child, and wife and slave—but evermore

Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar

Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.

Then someone said, 'We will return no more.'"

a complete novelet by

Otterburn found himself in a large room full of young girls



CHAPTER I

Guinea Pig

AS Thomas Otterburn entered the offices of the laboratory that Friday morning and hung his hat on the rack, he heard somebody call, "Tom!" behind him.

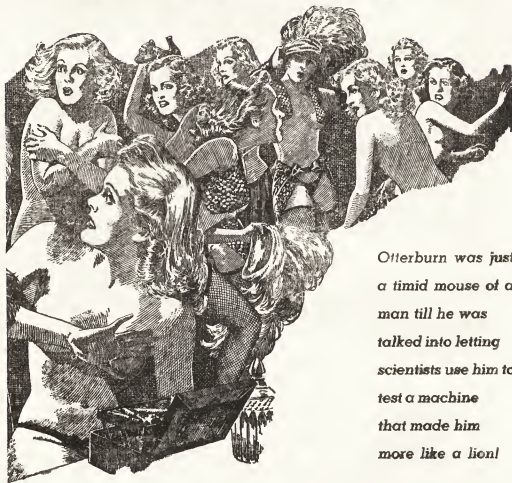
It was Eduard Dubrowsky from the

Psychoelectronic Section, looking more like a disheveled hawk than usual. Dubrowsky barked, "Busy this morning?"

"Good morning, Ed," murmured Otterburn with his usual formality. "Yes, I've got to get out the weekly project-

L. SPRAGUE DECAMP

The HIBITED MAN



*Otterburn was just
a timid mouse of a
man till he was
talked into letting
scientists use him to
test a machine
that made him
more like a lion!*

hour sheet, the biweekly news-letter, the monthly project report, the quarterly appropriations estimate, the—"

"Okay, okay—after lunch then."

"What after lunch?"

"You know, you know." Dubrowsky

lowered his voice and came closer. "We're ready for the first human test with the materio-stat. And you're going to be it. Remember?"

"Uh—yes, I suppose I do. But—"

"But nothing. See you after lunch in

my section."

"Oh, all right," Otterburn, wondering if he had been smart 'n volunteering for the first human tryout on Project Styx, sought his desk and spread out his papers.

On top of the pile in his in-box lay the envelope containing his pay-check. Jimmy the office-boy must have been around early. He slit the envelope and looked at the check to make sure, put the envelope in his pocket and plunged into his work despite the fact that he had ten minutes to go before the working day officially commenced.

Behind him he heard McQueen's loud: "Hi, genius!" as McQueen scaled his hat ten feet onto a hook beside Otterburn's.

"Good-morning, Donald," said Otterburn.

McQueen found his own desk, put his feet on it, ran a hand through his red hair and opened his newspaper. Presently he said, "It says here—say, for gossakes, Tom, why don't you relax? There's nobody here to be impressed by your industry except me, and heaven knows I'm not."

Otterburn looked at him briefly and went on working without reply. Then McQueen's feet came down off his desk with a bang. That meant that Seymour Barlow, head of the Fluid Mechanics Section and the mutual boss of Otterburn and McQueen, had arrived. McQueen, after a brief glance at the clock, continued reading his newspaper. Five minutes to go.

Otterburn looked up long enough to say, "Goc' morning, Mr. Barlow." Everybody else in the section called Barlow "Seymour," "Sey," or even "Fats."

Then, rapidly pro-rating hours of work among his various projects, he heard the sounds of the arrival of the other engineers in the section. From the glassed-in section of the big room devoted to the Stenographic Department came the clack of female tongues as the space filled up with stenos.

The bell sounded. At a certain click on heels Otterburn caught his breath and peered slantwise through his glasses without turning his head enough so you'd notice. Lucy Kneipf was coming in, one minute late as usual.

Otterburn called, "Good morning, Lucy," but so softly that the girl ap-

parently did not hear it.

Otterburn told himself that Barlow, as usual, would do nothing about Lucy's lateness. Good-looking girls really had no business going in for engineering and then disrupting the routine. However, if he were in Barlow's position he would no doubt do the same. He'd even take advantage of his position to date Lucy.

HIS mind left the figures to wander off into a fantasy in which he married Lucy in the teeth of competition from the entire section and settled down with her in some suburban paradise to raise a vast family and be the envy of the whole laboratory. He had never expected to fall in love with a short dark plump girl, especially since he was on the tall thin sandy side, but there it was.

His daydream was shattered by McQueen's bawl, "Hi, gorgeous! How's the lady engineer this morning? Boy, we sure spray-painted the town last night, didn't we?"

Lucy smiled and said something that Otterburn missed. Otterburn pressed his lips together angrily and forced his mind back to his figures. He despised himself. Here that booming extravert was no section head but he managed to date Lucy all right while he, Otterburn, had never nerved himself to get beyond the how-are-you-this-nice-morning stage.

Despite the fact that he was more intelligent than McQueen and a better engineer too, Barlow had practically told him so—that he was the smartest man in the section except old Matthias back in the corner there. And if he were going to get married ever he'd better start soon. He was going to be thirty.

"It's Friday in case any of you have forgotten," said Seymour Barlow.

McQueen gave a dramatic groan. "Paperwork day! I wish you guys with the brass would figure a way to let us poor mad scientists do our science instead of this glorified bookkeeping. Say, Tom!"

"Yes, Donald?" Otterburn turned his head. He thought that McQueen would probably not treat him so genially if he suspected that Thomas Otterburn was a rival for the esteem of Lucy Kneipf—even if only a latent rival.

"I sometimes wonder. Is it as bad as this in private industry? Or are all these

blasted reports and dope-sheets and things a disease peculiar to government?"

"I wouldn't know," said Otterburn. "I've worked for the government ever since I finished college, eight years ago."

Matthias cackled from his corner, "I can answer that one. Some big private companies are even worse. Every time some new super or manager comes in he thinks of a new periodical report he's simply got to have, so he sends out an order establishing it."

The only trouble is he never thinks to abolish any of the old reports, so they accumulate until the personnel spend all their time filling them out and haven't any time for useful work."

Otterburn forced his mind back to his work again—no easy feat, since this kind of paperwork was the dullest task he had to do. His mind wandered off into apprehensive speculation as to what might happen this afternoon when Dubrowsky tried out his darned gadget on him. He'd been foolish to accede to Dubrowsky's urgings. If he could only say, "No!" and make it stick. . . .

Lunch came before Otterburn realized it. He put away the small remainder of his paperwork, stopped at the check-cashing window to cash his paycheck and shuffled over to the cafeteria with the others of his section. He slouched along with nervous little steps, hands in pockets and eyes on the ground, mumbling polite responses to the hellos of his acquaintances from the other departments.

At the cafeteria he carefully let all the others of his section precede him through the door of the portion of the room partitioned off and marked *Executives, Engineers and Guests Only*.

Then, by quickly dodging around a table, he managed to reach Lucy Kneipf's chair in time to pull it out for her. She thanked him, and while he stood blushing and trying to think of a witty reply McQueen took the place on one side of her and another engineer that on the other.

McQueen made his usual complaints, long grown banal from repetition, about the food and the service. Then he barked at Otterburn, "Don't you think so too, Tom?"

Otterburn studied his plate and answered modestly: "Oh, I don't know. I've seen better and I've seen worse."

McQueen snorted, "Try and get you to criticize anything or anybody!" and turned his attention to giving Miss Kneipf a shamelessly public buss.

Otterburn felt a hand on his shoulder, and there was Dubrowsky looking down at him. "Coming to our lab right after you finish, Tom?"

"We-ell," said Otterburn hesitantly, "I do have some more to do on the quarterly estimate."

"Oh, fertilize the estimate! It'll keep till Monday and we can't wait around. You promised you'd help us, didn't you?"

"Why, sure, you know that."

"All right then, come over to the lab with me when you finish."

Otterburn wiped his mouth, folded his paper napkin neatly, rose and followed the engineers of the Psychoelectronic Section to their own part of the building. This laboratory had a *No Admittance* sign on the door.

In front of the door stood a desk at which sat a policewoman with a register. Otterburn signed the register, and followed the others in. These were Dubrowsky, Dubrowsky's young P-1 assistant, and Dubrowsky's associate, de Castro, a bald and burly psychologist.

The test was to be the first tryout on a human being of what some mythological-minded functionary in the Bureau had christened Project Styx. Otterburn had become involved in this project by solving a minor but baffling problem in the design of the apparatus—a matter of getting an actuator—mechanism into a small space—for the regular engineers on the project.

Since the project was classed as *Secret* he had had to be cleared for secret information outside of his own immediate field. And because the plan had fascinated him—although he was not an electronics man—he had kept in touch with it ever since and had let Dubrowsky talk him into volunteering for the first tests on a live man.

Dubrowsky ambled over to his section of the laboratory and extracted from the general clutter on the workbench a mess of straps and cables, saying, "This is her. Want to take off your coat and shirt?"

Otterburn, while stripping to the waist, asked, "How did those live tests come out?"

Dubrowsky said, "Fine, except that the field seems to extend in from the surface of the skin as well as out."

"What does that do?"

"Nearly as we can figure from the effects on the animals it affects parts of their brains."

"*Huh?*" said Otterburn in a tone of alarm.

"Nothing serious. Has an effect like a little alcohol. Doc can tell you."

"Yes," said de Castro. "It appears to affect mainly the frontal lobes and also some of the cortex, so as to decrease inhibitions and promote the thalamic functions. The dog, for instance, tended to forget that he was housebroken while he had it on."

Otterburn said, "Boy, I sure hope it doesn't—"

"I do not think so. Of course we do not really know with a human being. The effect on the fore-brain might suppress the super-ego."

"The what? I'm sorry, but that's out of my line."

"Of course, of course," said de Castro. "The super-ego is the name given in the old Freudian psychology to the section of the ego, mostly on the unconscious level, that criticizes one's performance by comparing it with some ideal and punishes one by making one unhappy when one fails to live up to the ideal."

"Do you mean the conscience?" said Otterburn. Dubrowsky was fastening the thing around his bare torso. There was a little flat black-enameled box in front, over his solar plexus, and another in back. The two were connected by a number of straps radiating from each, so that they looked not unlike a pair of enormous black spiders embracing Otterburn's trunk between them.

"No, not exactly the conscience," said de Castro. "That is on the conscious level."

"Let's not get off into psych terminology," said Dubrowsky. "Been listening to it for years now and I still don't understand it. The point is that it may temporarily uninhibit you a little, like a prefrontal lobotomy. Or inhibit you, if you prefer." He smiled at his little joke.

"That's why I wanted you to be the first subject because heaven knows if there's anybody on the station who's over-inhibited it's you. Gives us a mar-

gin of safety to play with."

De Castro smiled agreement. "Yes, Tom, you even stand out among a crowd of research scientists, who tend to be inhibited introverts—you know, the quiet, subdued, intellectual type—to begin with."

Dubrowsky said, "All right, she's ready to go. Are you?"

"Okay," said Otterburn, feeling a little like the Earl of Essex giving his own executioner the signal to swing the ax. Despite the excitement inside him, however, he kept his voice as low and steady as always.

CHAPTER II

Night with Kneipf

DUBROWSKY clicked the switch on the chest-section of the materio-stat, saying: "We'll try it on low power first." He turned the knob control to the first index figure. "Feel anything?"

"No, not a thing—wait, it tingles a little," said Otterburn.

They waited several minutes in silence. "Anything now?" asked Dubrowsky.

"No. I got used to the tingle so I don't notice it."

"How about your brain?"

"Hasn't affected it at all as far as I can tell."

"All right, let's begin testing. Brace yourself." Dubrowsky put his hand out and touched the skin of Otterburn's face, neck, and thorax. Then he began slapping lightly, making a note on a pad after each slap.

As long as he moved his hand slowly nothing out of the ordinary happened, but as he slapped harder, some force manifested itself just before his hand reached his subject's skin, so that his slaps were slowed and cushioned before they reached their target.

"Try intermediate," suggested de Castro.

Dubrowsky turned the control a notch higher. "Any feeling?"

"No, sir," said Otterburn. "A little more tingle but that's going away now. Okay, go ahead, sock me one."

Dubrowsky tried more slaps. This time, when he struck hard, his hand

bounced back before it reached Otterburn's skin at all. Finally Dubrowsky doubled his fist and threw a stiff punch at Otterburn's jaw.

The fist bounced off empty air. Otterburn's head rocked a bit as the energy of the fist was transferred to it through the cushioning medium of the materio-stat field but he grinned.

"Hot spit!" he said. "That didn't hurt at all. Here, you give me a whack with that stick!"

De Castro raised an eyebrow—after all he was nearly twice Otterburn's age—but wordlessly picked up the sawed-off broomstick and swung on Otterburn. The stick swooshed through the air and bounced harmlessly away.

Otterburn's grin became broader. "Say, this is the thing to wear when you're attending a riot! Too bad we haven't got a bow and arrow," he said. "We could put on a William Tell act. I know, how about a baseball? I don't suppose there'd be one around the lab, would there?"

"Come to think of it, one of the mechs has one they play catch with in the lunch hour," said Dubrowsky. "Hey, John!"

The mechanic presently produced one very dirty hard baseball out of his tool-box. "You want I should lend you the gloves too?" he said.

"No thanks," said Dubrowsky. "Stand by, everybody!" He wound up and hurled the ball at Otterburn in a very creditable pitch.

The ball ricocheted off the field and went through a pane of glass separating Dubrowsky's part of the laboratory from that adjoining. The tinkle of falling glass mingled with shouts of alarm and indignation from the engineers in the next section.

"Oh-oh," said Dubrowsky. "Must be getting kind of hibited myself." He recovered the baseball, pacified the occupants of the adjacent booth as best he could and returned the ball to its owner.

"Now," he said with artificial solemnity, "let's try high."

When he turned the control as far as it would go, the results were similar only more so. Even a light tap was repulsed, and the subject's clothes showed a tendency to bag out from his body as he moved.

Dubrowsky said, "With that setting

you'd have to be careful about eating. If you shoved a forkful of grub at your face too fast it would fly off at a tangent."

Otterburn, moving tentatively, said, "Wouldn't be practical unless I were going to jump off a high building or something. Now let's try the stat at various settings with all my clothes on"

Two hours later de Castro asked, "You say you do not feel any effect, any mental effect that is?"

"Not a bit. I never felt better"

"It might be that you are afflicted with euphoria," said de Castro, "like that induced by alcohol or anoxemia."

Otterburn shook his head vigorously. "Nonsense, Doc. I've drunk liquor and I've been anoxic in the altitude chamber and I know what euphoria feels like. I feel perfectly normal. Want me to do some simple addition to show you?"

De Castro looked at his watch. "That is a good idea for another series of tests, but I fear we cannot start them tonight."

"Jeepers, nearly quitting time!" said Otterburn. "Say, why don't you guys let me wear this thing overnight, just to make sure it has no mental effects?"

"Oh, couldn't do that," said Dubrowsky quickly. "Secret equipment."

"And you could not return it until Monday," said de Castro.

"So what? It's under my clothes where it doesn't show." Otterburn stood up in a marked manner and buttoned his coat.

"I've made up my mind. It'll take Ed half an hour to get this thing off me and I've got a date this evening—that is, I hope to have a date—and don't want to be late. It'll be perfectly safe, because as you said yourself nothing can happen to me. Even bullets would bounce off, and the faster they come the harder they bounce."

He grinned. "Anyway I don't see how you guys can stop me. All I have to do is turn the control to high and to heck with you!"

He walked out, leaving the men staring at one another in wonderment and alarm, uncertain what to do about his high-handed action.

On his way back to his own department, Otterburn paused to take out his

wallet and check the currency in it. His routine had always been to go home, calculate his expenses for the next two weeks and take the rest of his pay down to the bank during their Friday evening open hour and deposit it. He had never, at least consciously, thought of blowing all his pay in one tremendous binge. Well, why shouldn't he? He was only young once.

He strode into the space occupied by his own section. The engineers were standing around the hatrack, gassing and watching the clock. Otterburn tapped Lucy Kneipf firmly on the shoulder. "This way," he said with a jerk of his head. "Doing anything tonight, gorgeous?"

"Why—uh—let me think. No, I—"

"Okay, then how about dinner and a show with me?"

"Well, I—I'd like to, but Don said he might come around."

"Oh, bolt Don McQueen! Why should you let him keep you dangling? Come on, what do you say?" He managed to put such an unexpected man-of-distinction air into the invitation that the girl stammered: "Wh-Why, all right."

"Good. Pick you up at eighteen-hundred." Why had he ever been afraid to ask her out? And why had he ever cringed before McQueen? When he threw out his chest and straightened his back he was fully as large as the red-head.

The bell rang, and he passed McQueen on the way out. The latter looked at him with an expression compounded of puzzlement and suspicion.

Otterburn swung his arm to give McQueen a hearty clap on the back and roared "Good-night, you old weasel! Have a crummy week-end!"

The only hitch was that his slap on the back failed to make contact. His hand bounced back without ever touching McQueen's sports jacket, though McQueen staggered a little from the transmitted force of the blow.

OTTERBURN showed up at Lucy Kneipf's house at six-fifteen. When she came downstairs she paused at the sight of his dinner-jacket, from which floated a faint odor of naphthalene.

"It won't do," he said sternly. "Go back up and put on a dinner-dress."

"But—I'm sorry. Why didn't you

tell me? After all—" Resentment made itself heard in her voice.

However, he cut her off with, "That's all right. One of these days I shall probably ask you to marry me and you will probably accept. So you might—"

"What?"

"Sure. You don't think I'd let a pretty girl like you spend the rest of your life running a slide-rule, do you? So you might as well get in practise now."

She stood with her mouth open as if one of the experimental rabbits in the Psychoelectric Laboratory had roared at her with the voice of a lion. Then she quietly went upstairs and reappeared ten minutes later in a longer dress.

He ushered her out and into a taxi with a lordly air as if he did this sort of thing all the time. "We're eating at the Troc," he said. "It's probably a clip-joint but just let 'em try to clip me and see what happens. It's only a block from the show."

"What show is it?"

"*Crinolina*. Oh, it just occurred to me—I hope you haven't seen it?"

"N-no."

"You like musicals, I trust. I 'phoned Bergen's and got two on the aisle, fifth row. If we don't like it we can walk out in the middle. Hey, driver, a little more speed, please! Say, have you heard about Dillworth in the Metallurgical Lab and his wife? Darndest thing—"

He rattled on about office gossip, his own opinions on everything and his plans for his—that is to say their—future. Finally she got a word in edgewise.

"You know, Tom, you've talked more in the last fifteen minutes than in all the six months I've known you?"

"Is that so? I talk rather well, don't you think? Now—oh, here we are. Just a min while I fling a purse of gold to our charioteer."

In the restaurant he told the head-waiter, "Two please. Your very best table, and not too near the music."

When the music started he said, after a slight hesitation, "Dance?"

"But there's nobody else on the floor. Let's wait—"

"All the better. We're less likely to bump people. What do we care if they look at us?"

"Oh, but please, Tom. Wait till there are at least a few—"

Otterburn's eyes took on a dangerous glitter. "If you won't dance with me, Lucy," he said, "I shall get out there and do a solo!" He rose. "Are you coming?"

She hastily followed him to the floor. After a couple of turns she said, "Why, you're not as bad as I—I mean, you're good!"

He smiled tolerantly. He had thought, himself, that his coordination seemed exceptionally good this evening. "For a man who hasn't danced in nearly a year I get along. I find I can do practically anything I want to if I put my mind to it. The only trouble is that I know only a couple of simple steps.

"You'll have to teach me some of those fancy Latin American numbers. You know, like this!" He stamped his feet and wagged his fundament to indicate his idea of a South American dance ignoring the fact that he was still the only man on the dance floor.

However, more were now coming in from all sides. Presently the floor became crowded, and Otterburn said, "Our cocktails have arrived, I see. To heck with dancing. Let's drink!"

She said, "Tom, what on earth has come over you? It's as if some other personality had suddenly taken over your body."

"What? Why? Nothing's come over me. I'm perfectly normal and never felt better in my life. If you don't believe me I can recite my past history for the last fifteen years to show you I remember it. Ahh, good cocktail. Waiter, the menu. Hey, waiter!" His voice rose to a near-shout to emphasize his point.

When dinner was slow in coming, Otterburn made unpleasant comparisons between the Troc and the government cafeteria where they ate lunch. Then he shouted and banged on his glass until he got attention. The head-waiter and all the other waiters were by now beginning to bend black looks upon him as if he had chosen their place to start a public temperance lecture.

When the noise of the music and the general chatter made it hard for him to make himself heard he simply sat back and raised his voice to a bellow.

"Look at those four fat slob at the

table in back of you, Lucy! The ones with the red faces and the loud voices. Must be a bunch of salesmen figuring how to trim their customers. Anybody who makes that much racket ought to be hove out. For a nickel I'd heave a roll at 'em."

"Please don't," wailed Miss Kneipf. "Control yourself, Tom! They're not doing any harm and they're not making a bit more noise than you are!"

"Heck" growled Otterburn, "I've controlled myself too much." He attacked the remains of his steak. "Hey, waiter! Dessert, please!"

CHAPTER III

Fresh Paint

WHEN the check finally arrived Otterburn looked at it closely, then called, "Waiter, come here! What's this charge? I thought you had a big sign out front, 'No Cover Charge'. How about it?"

The waiter looked. "Oh, sir, that's a the minimum liquor charge."

"What's that? I haven't seen anything about it on your menu."

The waiter turned the menu over and pointed to a line of three-point type, barely visible. By holding the menu up to the light and straining his eyes, Otterburn made out the words *Minimum liquor charge, \$5.00 per person.*

Otterburn said, "Lucy, run along and meet me in front of the ticket-agency. Know where Bergen's is? Same block as the theater but on the corner of Fifteenth."

"But why, Tom?"

"Because I'm going to make a disturbance. I told you I wouldn't let these gypartists clip me. So if you don't want to get caught in a riot be on your way. No argument now!"

Then, turning back to the waiter, he roared, "You mean you expect me to read that line of flyspecks? To heck with you! I'll pay for the one cocktail apiece the young lady and I had and for our dinners and that's all."

"Shall I getta the manager, sir?"

"Yes, bring on your manager! Here's what I owe you, and not another cent

do you get. Get out of my way!"

Finding his path blocked by a couple of very large waiters, and hearing the headwaiter cry, "Get that guy!" Otterburn seized the corner of the tablecloth that covered the table at which sat the four noisy fat red-faced men. They were noisy no longer, however, since like all the other customers they were watching Thomas Otterburn.

He pulled the tablecloth, which came off the table with a frightful crash of plates and glasses, and threw it over the heads of the burly waiter.

Waiters rushed at him from all points of the compass. Although Otterburn kicked a couple of tables over to block their path, a couple did get close enough to throw punches and kicks, which however merely bounced off his force-screen.

"Gyp me, eh?" he yelled. "I'll show you crooks. Come on, why don't you hit me?" He pushed a large waiter, who had been vainly trying to punch his face, so that the man fell backwards, carrying a couple more tables with him.

As Otterburn dodged about the throng of waiters trying to get at him and customers trying to get away the air became filled with plates, glasses and a chair or two flying at him. All bounced off.

As he heard a waiter yell: "*E un' diavolo!*" he plunged through the door of the men's washroom. Seeing the window open, he climbed out, dropped to the ground and walked the length of the alley to the street.

A waiter was leading a policeman into the Troc. Otterburn shrank back into the shadow until they had passed out of sight. Then he took stock of himself.

The Troc still had his hat but perhaps he had better not try to reclaim it just yet. It wasn't much of a hat anyhow. He must buy one of those snappy black-felt numbers, like the hats priests wore, to wear with his tux.

Said tux had several spots made by water, liquor and food that had not come at him so fast as to be deflected off by the field and his knees were dusty from the climb through the window. He dusted his knees and worked on the spots for some seconds with his handkerchief.

Then, considering himself presenta-

ble enough for practical purposes, he stepped out of his alley and melted into the throng just as the policeman stuck his head out the window of the men's washroom to see what had become of *il diavolo*.

Since Otterburn's watch told him that he had plenty of time yet he strolled slowly toward Bergen's, ogling the crowds as they passed. He had always been puzzled by stories of men accosted or picked up by girls on the street, since nothing of the sort had ever happened to him.

The reason, he now realized, was simply that he had never made a practise of ogling but instead had always walked with a quick and businesslike step, his eyes glued dutifully to the pavement in front of him.

NOW HE was surprised to observe how many of the girls were walking slowly and unaccompanied and how they returned his stare with an expression that seemed on the verge of breaking into a welcoming smile if he would only encourage them. He must look into this matter some time when he didn't have Lucy on his hands. Speaking of whom—

Lucy was not in front of Bergen's. Otterburn picked up his tickets and waited outside the speculator's for five minutes, becoming more and more impatient. She must have stood him up though he couldn't imagine why. It wasn't as if he'd done anything offensive or out of the ordinary. Oh well, there were just as good fish in the sea and he couldn't fool around all evening.

He started down the street towards the theater, scanning the crowd for another pick-up. There didn't seem to be so many now that he was actually looking for them. However, two doors short of the theater he spotted a girl standing still in the doorway—a tall bleached-blond, good-looking despite a beaky nose, heavy makeup and a distinctly used look.

"Good evening, miss," he said politely, showing his tickets. "I beg your pardon but my girl just stood me up. Would you like to go to the show next door with me?"

"Why—" she hesitated, giving him a calculating eye. "Sure, I don't mind. My boy-friend has let me down too. My name's M'rie; what's yours?"

By the time they reached their seats Otterburn was telling the girl whatever came into his head. He rattled on, "Got a date after the show? No? Fine. We'll come up to my place. Heck of a dump but it's home to me.

"I can't ask you to see my etchings because I only own one and that's not very good but I'll show it to you if you insist. We might stop at the liquor store on the way and get a bottle of anti-freeze. Make a real night of it."

"Why *Mister Otterburg*," she said coyly, "I only just know you."

"It occurs to me," he said as they sat down, "that I don't even know whether this show's any good. I haven't been reading the reviews. Say, that gives me an idea! I won't be gypped twice in one evening—three times, if you count my girl's running out on me. You wait here a minute. I'll be right back."

Five minutes later, as the music started he returned with a large paper bag. He gave M'rie a peek inside. It was full of tomatoes. "Now," he said "the show had *better* be good."

Alas, *Crinolina* was not good—at least not according to Thomas Otterburn's hypercritical taste. During the first act he commented on the low quality of the performance so audibly that people shushed him. It began to dawn upon him that if it had been a better show he probably couldn't have obtained such good seats on short notice.

During the second act a heroine in crinoline and a hero in the garb of a pre-Civil-War South'n gentleman engaged in an endless love-duet that went round and round without getting anywhere. When the hero finally kissed the heroine's dainty hand, and then placed a tall beaver hat on his yellow curls, Otterburn stood up.

He cried, "It stinks!" and let fly with a tomato.

The first missile splashed against the backdrop. The second carried away the hero's top-hat and the third disappeared into the folds of the heroine's vast skirts.

The aria died as if beheaded. Shouts resounded through the house. Feeling a hand snatch at him from behind, Otterburn turned quickly to face a man in the audience who had risen to grapple with him and let him have a tomato in the face.

M'rie cowered away from him as if he were an inhuman monster. He stepped out into the aisle and threw his two remaining tomatoes at the ushers pounding down it towards him, then ran.

His flight took him to the orchestra in three long steps. He had some vague idea of leaping to the stage and escaping out the wings. Now, however, he saw a small door at one side of the orchestra-pit, below the level of the footlights. Into this he bolted and slammed it shut behind him.

INSIDE the door steps led down and to the left. He found himself in a big room below the stage, a room full of ropes and pieces of scenery. There was machinery for moving the stage itself and things whose names he did not even know.

Off to the left, where the scenery was piled thickest, there seemed to be a space cleared for a workroom.

He ran that way. No exit—only a middle-aged man touching up a piece of stage-scenery with green paint. Apparently he was in that undiscovered country called backstage though he had always thought of it as being literally in back of the stage and not underneath.

The man, looking at him mildly as he approached, said, "What goes on, mister?"

Steps resounded on the stairs Otterburn had just descended and he saw a couple of ushers sprinting towards him. For some reason the painter's equipment fascinated him—what fun couldn't he have with a can of that lovely green paint? He snatched up the large can the painter was using, wrenched the 4½-inch paint-brush out of the astonished man's hand—and then started running again.

He dropped the paint-brush into the can so as to have a free hand, toppled a couple of pieces of scenery in the path of his pursuers and came out the other end of the workroom, back in the large room again.

To the other side of the stairs by which he had come down he saw a passage and ran for it.

The passage went straight on for a short distance. Then there was a little flight of steps leading up to another door and the passage did a square turn to the right. At the sight of something moving

in front of him, Otterburn started so hard he spilled paint before realizing that the moving thing was his reflection in a huge full-length mirror beside a double door.

He ran on down the passage to the right to where it did another turn, to the left this time, and ended with a door marked *Green Room. No admittance except to theater personnel.*

As he took in this message the door flew open and a couple more ushers boiled out.

They checked as they saw him facing them, giving him time to turn and flee back the way he had come.

But when he got back to the big mirror and the double door, here came the other two ushers who had followed him the way he had come. There seemed to be no way to go except through the double door.

Therefore he wrenched it open and plunged in.

He found himself in a large room full of lockers, mirrors long dressing-tables and a score or more of girls in all stages of nudity, some sitting at the tables and working on their makeup while others struggled into and out of articles of costume.

AS soon as his entrance became obvious the girls set up a chorus of screams.

Some held garments in front of them while others simply yelled at him. Knuckles pounded the door.

It took Otterburn a few seconds to decide on his next course of action while fragments of stories he had read and movies he had seen floated through his head. Deciding that terror tactics were in order, he twisted his face into a horrid grimace and raced about the room, screaming at the top of his lungs and slapping wildly with his dripping brush at every patch of bare skin he saw—which under the circumstances included a great deal.

The shrieks of the girls rose to a deafening crescendo. A few threw bottles and jars of cosmetics at him, which he heeded not at all. By showing his teeth and foaming a bit he soon had the entire mob rushing out the double door, bowling over the ushers standing there or else carrying them along in the torrent. Otterburn, counting on just that, followed them closely out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

Free Man

ONCE outside, the crowd streamed off in all directions. Some ran for the Green Room, others for the circular staircase at the back of the scenery room that led up to the stage—Otterburn later wondered what the audience must have thought when the females boiled out onto the stage yelling their heads off.

Others ran up the little stairs near the mirror and threw open the door which, as Otterburn could see, was the main backstage exit, the *Stage Door*. He ran up the steps after them and followed them down another alley to the street.

Since it was the middle of the theater hour with most of the customers in their seats, the crowd on the sidewalks had thinned. Otterburn, thinking it about time he went away from there, looked around for means of transportation.

In front of him he saw a policeman's horse, standing calmly with one forefoot on the curb. No doubt the cop had parked the animal while he went into the theater to investigate the disturbance. Well, he might as well have one more fling.

Otterburn, still clutching his paint-can, swung into the saddle. He collected the reins into his left hand—which also held the paint-can—and kicked the horse into motion. At first the beast showed signs of fractiousness at being mounted by a strange rider, but in his present exalted mood Thomas Otterburn was no man to let a mere horse buffalo him. He whacked the animal's rump with the paint-brush and set it to cantering down the avenue.

Ahead of him, screaming, ran three of the chorus-girls. One wore a petticoat with wire stiffening, another a brassière, and the third a pair of shoes and a broad green stripe across her backside.

Otterburn took a good schloop of paint on his brush and, as his horse passed a bald pedestrian, brought the brush down with a smack on the man's head. He swung at another man afoot but missed and almost swung himself out of the saddle. A third dodged be-

hind an automobile when he saw Otterburn's intention.

Then the three babes had disappeared and from behind him rose a clamor of yells, whistles and sirens. It was time to switch again. He pulled up at a corner and jumped off the horse. The force-field, as he expected, saved him from the jar when he hit pavement.

He threw the paint-can as far as he could and, with the brush again slapped the horse, which took off down the avenue. Looking hastily around, Otterburn sighted a fire-box. He quickly pulled a false alarm by way of diversion and ran down the side-street.

Since this street, on the edge of the theatrical district, was occupied almost entirely by office-buildings and garment-lofts, it had hardly any pedestrians. The few there were looked at Otterburn as he ran past, but made no move to stop him. At the next corner he turned again. The most promising refuge was an all-night barber-shop. He leaped down the four steps that led to it.

When police and firemen swarmed over the neighborhood five minutes later, Thomas Otterburn lay blissfully in a barber-chair with his face covered by lather. He had just finished saying, "Don't shave the upper lip. Think I'll grow a mustache."

By the time the barber had finished the commotion had died. Otterburn looked ruefully at his suit, which now bore several smears of green paint in addition to the spots from its earlier misadventures. He asked, "Have you got some turpentine?"

As it happened the barber did have some turpentine. When Otterburn had abated the worst of the paint-stains he thanked the barber, paid up and strolled back to the street. Everything seemed normal.

He stretched his muscles a little. A shade tired, yes, but not the least bit sleepy. Who said go home? The night was yet young and even if Lucy and M'rie were gone beyond recovery there were plenty more. . . .

NEXT morning at about ten Thomas Otterburn opened his front door in answer to a knock. Before he could move strong arms shot in and seized his wrists. Handcuffs clicked.

"We got him, Professor," said one

of the cops, holding tight. "Okay, now you turn the gadget off."

Otterburn started to remonstrate when he recognized Seymour Barlow, Eduard Dubrowsky and Dr. de Castro. Dubrowsky opened the front of Otterburn's pajamas wide enough to get his fingers on the switch of the materiostat.

Click!

"All right," he said. "He's no longer invulnerable, and if you'll unlock these handcuffs and hold his arms I'll get the contraption off him."

"Am I pinched?" asked Otterburn innocently.

"You sure are, brother," said one of the cops.

"What for? That little fun I had last night?"

"*Whew!* Just about everything. Disorderly conduct, assault, stealing a cop's horse, a can of paint and et cetera."

Otterburn's eyes lighted up. "You know, I've never been pinched in my life, even for speeding? This'll be swell. I've always wondered what it would be like to be tried and sentenced."

"No, no," wheezed Barlow. "Don't say such dreadful things, Tom. We'll prove to the court that it was all the fault of this infernal machine of Ed's, which affected you so that all your brain was numb except the thalamus. How do you feel now, you poor boy? Ed, if you've ruined his mind I'll never forgive you."

"I'm all right," said Otterburn. "A little tired maybe. But you know, I didn't sleep a wink all night?"

"That is as I thought it might be," said de Castro. "Since sleep is an inhibitory process the field, by suppressing that process, prevents sleep."

Otterburn waved the explanation aside. "Say, how did you guys find out I was the culprit?" If they were looking for a sudden return of his mousy-meek former personality with the switching off of the materiostat they were disappointed. He faced them with a grin, thoroughly at ease and willing to talk forever on any subject they chose.

Barlow explained, "Lucy—you know, she went home when you first started acting up in that night-club. She thought you'd gone crazy. Anyway, she read in the paper this morning about the dangerous madman who terrorized the theatrical district last night. She

figured you must be it, and called me on the 'phone. I got the cops, because we couldn't let you go on that way, you know. What did you do the rest of the night?"

"Tell you some time," said Otterburn with a leer.

"Oh. Look him over, Doc. You can't move him until he's been examined, officer. No telling what state the poor boy's health is in."

De Castro gave Otterburn a brief once-over—pulse, temperature, knee-jerk, and other elementary tests. He removed the stethoscope from his ears and said, "He seems in perfect condition to me. As for his mental condition I should have to give him more extensive tests."

"Very well officer," said Barlow. "Guess we go down to the magistrate and speak our piece as soon as poor Tom gets his clothes on—oh, who are you?"

A man had stepped into the apartment, saying, "Good morning. You Mr. Otterburn? Got something for ya. G'bye."

Otterburn turned the papers that had been thrust into his hands over a few times before he unfolded them and started to read them.

Barlow looked over his shoulder and whistled. "Summons for a civil suit by the Trocadero Restaurant and another by the Mayfair Theater. You poor, poor fellow! I'll try to find a good lawyer."

Otterburn carelessly stuck the papers in the pocket of the coat he was putting on. "Okay, it doesn't worry me any. Let's go, gents."

TWO HOURS later they were at the laboratory. Because the judge was not sitting that Saturday morning Otterburn was out on bail or Barlow's custody, pending his hearing.

De Castro, who had been giving Otterburn psychological tests, said, "He reacts normally for a man of extra-verted type. Not the extreme state he was in while he had the harness on but still an uninhibited type with little super-ego control."

"However, with his high intelligence the suppression of the super-ego is not too harmful because he will avoid antisocial actions on a basis of calculated self-interest."

"Does that mean he's safe to let run loose?" asked Barlow.

"Surely. If I had met him for the first time I should have said he was a natural-born salesman or actor type. Whether in his present state he is suitable for scientific research is another matter."

"What's the prognosis?"

"I have no idea, since the case is without precedent. He may remain as he is or revert to his former condition."

Dubrowsky spoke up. "Afraid that's the end of Project Styx. Idea was to provide a light psychoelectronic armor for soldiers to deflect bullets and things approaching the surface of an organic substance at high speed. Obviously won't do if the harness makes men into maniacs."

"Of course," said de Castro, "this was an extreme case. This young man has led a very repressed life, so under the influence of the field he tried to throw off all the inhibitions and repressions of the last ten years at once."

"Still wouldn't be practical," said Dubrowsky.

"Not for you, perhaps," said de Castro, "but for me I see all sorts of possibilities. For melancholics, where the inhibitory process has been carried to the point of catatonia."

"Tom," said Barlow, "you've got two or three weeks' leave accumulated. Why don't you take your vacation now? And if there's any question at the end of that time take some leave without pay on top of it. I'll shuffle the papers so you can come back to your job when you're up to it."

Otterburn yawned. "Okay, Fats, I'm up to anything."

"Well—uh—that's not all. This business will give us bad publicity. Arrests, civil suits and the like. We might even have a Congressional Committee snooping around and it would be just as well if you weren't here when they were. See what I'm getting at?"

"I see all right," said Otterburn, rising. "And I can say this, Seymour—take your job and stick it. I'm through. Have one of the girls type me out a resignation and send it to my apartment and I'll sign it. So long, twerps!" He went out whistling.

• • • • •
A month later Thomas Otterburn, having made his peace with the law,

turned up unexpectedly at the laboratories.

Grinning, poised and dressed well if a shade loudly, he shook hands and slapped backs all around.

"Hey there, Lucy!" he cried. "Give us a kiss—that's a good girl. You engaged to Don yet? Why, what's holding you up? Don't look at me that way. I'm having too much fun as a professional wolf."

"Hi, Seymour! I just dropped in to make arrangements with the paint lab for submitting samples for tests under the new ND specs. Yeah, I'm a paint-salesman now. Straight commish plus bonus and I'm making twice as much as you are and three times as much as I ever did. Oh, there's my man now. So long."

"Wait a second," said Barlow. "What happened to those civil suits? The restaurant and the theater?"

"Oh, I talked them out of it."

"You *what*?"

"Sure, I convinced 'em the publicity was worth more than the damage they'd

suffered. They're not bad guys when you get to talk to them. Same way I got my job. I went after the company that made the paint I used to decorate those babes' behinds. Well, be seein' ya."

They stared after the departing demon salesman. Lucy said, "I'm afraid I liked him better the way he was before. Now he makes even Donald seem like a quiet meek sort by comparison."

"Me meek?" snorted McQueen. "Why—"

Barlow said, "I guess that's our answer; he's changed for good. And to think the poor boy was one of my most brilliant intellects. That's a real tragedy—our most promising young engineer a martyr to science."

Donald McQueen interrupted. "What d'you mean, martyr? Didn't you get that about the dough he's making? He looks prosperous, don't he? Well then, who's crazy, him or us?"

Barlow started, then looked very uncomfortable. "Well, I suppose if you put it that way—"



Is It Safe To See Into the Future?

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LET THE FINDER BEWARE

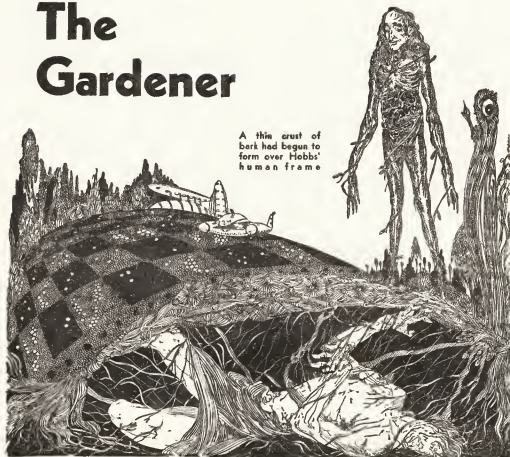
A Brilliant Short Novel

by

JAMES BLISH

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE!

The Gardener



By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

TRAFFIC cops have been known to disregard "No Parking" signs. Policemen filch apples from fruit stands under the proprietor's very eye. Even a little authority makes its possessor feel that the rules don't apply to *him*. Thus it was that Tiglath Hobbs, acting chief of the Bureau of Extra-Systemic Plant Conservation, cut down a sacred Butandra tree.

It must have been sheer bravado

which impelled him to the act. Certainly the grove where the Butandra trees grow (there are only fifty trees on all Cassid, which means that there are only fifty in the universe) is well protected by signs.

Besides warnings in the principal planetary tongues, there is a full set of the realistic and expressive Cassidan pictographs. These announce, in shapes which even the dumbest intellect could not

The bureaucrat decided that the penalty for destroying a Butandra tree didn't apply to him, but discovered to his horror that no one was excepted from the Law of Cassid!

misunderstand, that cutting or mutilating the trees is a crime of the gravest nature. That persons committing it will be punished. And that after punishment full atonement must be made.

All the pictographs in the announcement have a frowning look, and the one for "Atonement" in particular is a threatening thing. The pictographs are all painted in pale leaf green.

But Hobbs had the vinegary insolence of the promoted bureaucrat. He saw that he had shocked Reinald, the little Cassidan major who had been delegated his escort, by even entering the sacred grove. He felt a coldly exhibitionistic wish to shock him further.

Down the aisle of trees Hobbs stalked while the tender green leaves murmured above his head. Then he took hold of the trunk of the youngest of the Butandras, a slender white-barked thing, hardly more than a sapling.

"Too close to the others," Hobbs said sharply. "Needs thinning." While Reinald watched helplessly, he got out the little hand axe which hung suspended by his side. Chop—chop chop. With a gush of sap the little tree was severed. Hobbs held it in his hand.

"It will make me a nice walking stick," he said.

Reinald's coffee-colored skin turned a wretched nephrite green but he said nothing at all. Rather shakily he scrambled back into the 'copter and waited while Hobbs completed his inspection of the grove. It was not until they had flown almost back to Genlis that he made a remark.

"You should not have done that, sir," he said. He ran a finger around his tunic collar uneasily.

Hobbs snorted. He looked down at the lopped-off stem of the Butandra, resting between his knees. "Why not?" he demanded. "I have full authority to order plantations thinned or pruned."

"Yes, sir. But that was a Butandra tree."

"What has that to do with it?"

"There have always been fifty Butandra trees on Cassid. Always, for all our history. We call them 'Cassid's Luck'." Reinald licked his lips. "The tree you cut down will not grow again. I do not know what will happen if there are only forty-nine."

"Besides that, what you did is dangerous. Dangerous, I mean, sir, to you."

HOBBS laughed harshly. "You're forgetting my position," he answered. "Even if they wanted to, the civil authorities couldn't do anything to me."

Reinald gave a very faint smile. "Oh, I don't mean the civil authorities, sir," he said in a gentle voice. "They wouldn't be the ones." He seemed, somehow, to have recovered his spirits.

He set the 'copter down neatly on the roof of the Administration Building, and he and his passenger got out. Back in the grove near the stump of the sapling Butandra something was burrowing up rapidly through the soil.

Hobbs left Cassid the next day on the first leg of the long journey back to earth. In his baggage was the piece of Butandra wood. He was taking particular care of it since one of the room maids at his hotel in Genlis had tried to throw it out. But for the first few days of his trip he was altogether too occupied with filling out forms and drafting reports to do anything with it.

About this same time, on Cassid, a conversation was going on in the Hotel Genlis dining room.

"Tell us what you thought it was when you first saw it," Berta, the room maid for the odd-numbered levels in the hotel, urged. "Go on!"

Marie, the chief room maid, selected a piece of mangosteen torte from the food belt as it went by. "Well," she said, "I was checking the rooms on that level to be sure the robot help had cleaned up properly and when I saw that big brown spot on the floor my first thought was, one of them's spilled something. Robots are such dopes."

"Then it moved, and I saw it wasn't a stain at all, but a big brown thing snuffling around on the eutex like a dog after something. Then it stood up. That was when I screamed."

"Yes, but what did it look like? Go on, Marie! You never want to tell this part."

"It was a big tall lanky thing," Marie said reluctantly, "with a rough brown skin like a potato. It had two little pink mole hands. And it had an awfully, awfully kind face."

"If it had such a kind face I don't see why you were so scared of it," Berta said. She always said that at this point.

Marie took a bite out of her mangosteen torte. She ate it slowly, considering. It was not that the emotion she had experienced at sight of the face was at

all dim in her mind. It was that embodying it in words was difficult.

"Well," she said, "maybe it wasn't really kind. Or—wait now, Berta, I've got it—it was a kind face but not for people. For human beings it wasn't at all a kind face."

"Guess what room this happened in," Berta said, turning to Rose, the even-numbered room maid.

"I don't need to guess, I know," Rose drawled. "One thousand one hundred and eighty-five, the room that earthman had. The man that didn't leave any tip and gave you such a bawling-out for touching you-know-what."

Berta nodded. "If I'd *known*—" she said with a slight shudder. "If I'd *guessed*! I mean, I'd rather have touched a *snake*! Anyhow, Marie, tell Rose what you think the brown thing was."

"As Rose says, I don't need to guess, I know," Marie replied. She pushed the empty dessert plate away from her. "When a man cuts down one of our Butandra trees—that thing in the room was a Gardener."

The Gardener left the soil of Cassid with a minimum of fuss. Not for it the full thunder of rockets, the formalized pageantry of the spaceport. It gave a slight push with its feet and the soil receded. There was an almost imperceptible jetting of fire. Faster and faster the Gardener went. It left behind first the atmosphere of Cassid and then, much later, that planet's gravitational field. And still it shot on, out into the star-flecked dark.

ON HIS fourth day in space Hobbs got out the Butandra stick. Its heavy, white, close-grained wood pleased him. It would, as he had told Reinald, make a fine walking stick. Hobbs got a knife from his pocket and began carefully to peel off the tough white bark.

The bark came off as neatly as a rabbit's skin. Hobbs pursed his lips in what, for him, was a smile. He studied the contours of the wood and then started to whittle out a knob.

The wood was hard. The work went slowly. Hobbs was almost ready to put it aside and go down to the ship's bar for a nightcap when there came a light tapping at his cabin's exterior viewing pane.

When a ship is in deep space the sense of isolation becomes almost tangible. It

seeps into every pore of every passenger. The ship floats in ghostly fashion through an uncreated void in which there is nothing—can be nothing—except the tiny world enclosed by the curving beryllium hull. And now something—something *outside* the ship—was rapping on Hobbs' viewing pane.

For a moment Hobbs sat paralyzed, as near to stone as a man can be and still breathe. Then he dropped the Butandra stick and turned to the viewing pane. There was nothing there, of course—nothing but the black, the black.

Hobbs bit his lips. With slightly unsteady fingers he picked up the stick from the floor and locked it away in his valise. Then he tightened his belt around his paunch, buttoned up his coat and went down to the bar.

He found the second officer there. McPherson was drinking pomelo juice and eating a bosula tongue sandwich. A plump good-natured man, he always liked a little something to eat before he hit the sack. After his own drink had been brought Hobbs got into conversation with the second officer. A possible explanation for the noise he had heard had come to him.

"Something gone wrong with the ship?" he asked. "Is that why you've got a repair crew out on the hull?"

McPherson looked surprised. "Repair crew?" he echoed. "Why no, nothing's wrong. Captain Thorwald hates making repairs in deep space—always something faulty in them—and he wouldn't order repairs here unless the situation were really emergent. There's no crew out. What makes you ask that?"

"I—thought I heard something rapping on my viewing pane."

The second officer smiled. He decided to make a joke. "Been doing something you shouldn't, sir?" he said.

Hobbs put down his glass. "I beg your pardon?" he said icily.

The second officer grew sober. Hobbs, while not coming under the heading of VIP, was fairly important all the same.

"No offense meant, sir," he said. "Just a little joke. Don't you know how, in the stories spacemen tell, the curse or doom or whatever it is always shows itself to its victim in space by tapping on his viewing pane? When a man's broken a taboo on one of the planets, I mean. That was what I was referring to. Just a little joke."

"Oh," Hobbs swallowed. He held out his glass to the barman. "Another of the same," he said in a rather hoarse voice. "Make it a double."

Tiglath Hobbs was an extremely stubborn man. This quality, in some situations, is hardly to be distinguished from courage. Next wake-period he got out the Butandra stick again. With cold, unsteady fingers he worked on the knob. He had stationed himself close to the viewing plate.

There was no rapping this time. Hobbs did not know what it was that made him look up. Look up at last he did. And there, bobbing about in the tiny spot of light which seeped out through his viewing pane, was the smiling face the room maid in Genlis had seen. Brown and rough, it was regarding Hobbs with incredible, with indescribable benignity.

Hobbs uttered a cry. He pressed the button which sent the pane shutter flying into place. And the next moment he was standing by his cabin door, as far away from the pane as he could get, his fingers pressed over his eyes. When he stopped shuddering he decided to go see Captain Thorwald.

IT TOOK him a long time to get to the point. Thorwald listened, drumming with his fingers on his desk, while Hobbs circumlocuted, hesitated, retracted and corrected himself. What came out eventually was that he wanted Captain Thorwald—just for a moment, just for a fraction of a second—to have the ship's force field turned on.

Thorwald shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hobbs. It's impossible. Turning on the field would have to go into the log, you know, and there's no reason for it."

Hobbs hesitated. Then he got his wallet out. "I'll make it worth your while. Five hundred I.U.'s?"

"Sorry, no."

"Six hundred? Seven hundred? Money is always useful. You could say you ran into a meteor swarm."

"I—no."

"Eight hundred? Look here, I'll give you a thousand! Surely you could fix the log."

Thorwald's face wore a faint, sour smile but still he hesitated. "Very well," he said abruptly. "Let's say you bet me a thousand I.U.'s that I can't turn the ship's force field on and off again in a sixtieth of a second. Is that it? I warn

you, Mr. Hobbs, you're sure to lose your bet."

Hobbs' eyelids flickered. If the captain wanted to save his pride this way—

"I don't believe it!" he said with artificial vehemence. "I don't believe a field can be turned on and off that fast. It's a bet. I'll leave the stakes on the table, captain." From his wallet he drew ten crisp yellow notes.

Thorwald nodded. "Very well," he said without touching the money. "In half an hour, Mr. Hobbs, you shall have your demonstration. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Quite."

Thorwald nodded and picked up the notes with his right hand.

Hobbs went back to his cabin, raised the shutter and sat down by the viewing pane. He had keyed himself up to the pitch where it was almost a disappointment to him that the smiling face did not appear. The moments passed.

Abruptly the ship shook from stem to stern. A billion billion tiny golden needles lanced out into the dark. Then the cascade of glory was gone and the eternal black of space was back.

It had happened so quickly that, except for the pattern of light etched on his retina, Hobbs might have wondered whether he had seen it at all. Thorwald could certainly claim to have won his bet.

But Hobbs was well satisfied with what he had got for his thousand I.U.'s. In the fraction of a second that the force field had been turned on he had seen, crushed and blackened against the field's candent radiance, a dead scorched shapeless thing like a burned spider.

The myriad biting fires of the force field must have charred it instantly to the bone. What Hobbs had seen in that instant of incredible illumination was dead beyond a doubt, as dead as the moon.

By now it must be lying thousands upon thousands of kilos to the side of the ship's course, where the vast impetus of the field had sent it hurtling. Hobbs drew a deep, deep breath. Relief had made him weak.

When he and Thorwald met at the next meal they maintained a cautious cordiality toward each other. Neither of them, then or at any time thereafter, referred again to the bet.

That sleep-period Hobbs rested well.

In the next few days he regained most of his usual aplomb. Leisurely he finished carving the Butandra wood into a walking stick. It made a very nice one. By the time the ship docked at Llewellyn, an earth-type planet but with a third less than earth's normal gee, he was quite himself again.

In the depths of space, uncounted millions of kilometers away, the blackened husk of the Gardener floated weightlessly. It was quite dry and dead. But did it not stir a little from time to time as though a breeze rustled it? And what were those cracks that slowly appeared in it? Were they not like the cracks in a chrysalis?

Hobbs was well pleased with the state of the plantations on Llewellyn. He told the young man in charge of the local office so and the young man was gratified. By the end of the third day Hobbs was ready to resume his interrupted voyage toward Earth.

SOMETHING he saw in a sheet of stereo-press newsprint changed his mind. "Fiend robs, mutilates liner chief!" the big red scarehead bellowed. And then, in smaller type, the paper went on, "Minus finger and 1,000 I.U.'s, captain unable to name assailant. Police make search."

Hobbs—he was at breakfast—looked at the item incuriously until, in the body of the story, his eye caught a familiar name. Then he read with avid interest.

Eins Thorwald, captain of the luxury space liner *Rhea* (this was inaccurate—the *Rhea* was not a luxury liner but a freighter with fairly comfortable accommodation for five or six passengers) was in hospital today minus one thousand I.U.'s and the index finger of his right hand.

Thorwald, found in a state of collapse in his cabin by his second officer, Joseph McPherson (see page two for pictures), was unable to give details of the attack on him. He told police he had been robbed of exactly one thousand I.U.'s. Other currency in Thorwald's wallet was untouched.

Thorwald's finger, according to medical officer Dingby of the local police, appears to have been amputated with the help of a chisel or some similar instrument. No trace of the missing digit has been found.

Thorwald himself, after receiving several transfusions, is in Mercy Hospital, where his condition is reported serious. Police are operating on the theory that the attack was the work of some fiend whose hobby is collecting human fingers. A thorough search is being made and they expect an arrest soon.

Hobbs put the newsprint down. His hands were trembling. His florid cheeks had turned white. What he suspected, he told himself, was sheer lunacy.

Hadn't he himself seen the—thing which had rapped at his viewing pane reduced to a blackened cinder by the ravening fires of the force field? But Thorwald had been robbed of exactly one thousand I.U.'s. And he had picked up Hobbs' bribe with his right hand.

Hobbs pushed his plate away and asked the robot for his check. In the lobby he video'd Mercy Hospital and inquired for news of Thorwald. He was told that Thorwald's condition was serious and that he could not possibly see anyone.

Hobbs sat in the lobby for an hour or so and tried to think. At the end of that time he had come to a decision. Tiglath Hobbs was a stubborn man.

He called a 'copter and had it take him to the local office of the Bureau of Extra-Systemic Plant Conservation. Scott, the young man in charge of the office, was out and Hobbs had to wait for him.

It was nearly noon when Scott came in, very brown and erect in his clothing of forest green. He had been supervising the weeding of a plantation of young Tillya trees and there was mud on the knees of his trousers from kneeling beside the seedlings. The knees of his trousers were always a little muddy. He had the green heart of the true forester.

Hobbs came to the point at once. "Scott," he said, "I want you to go to Cassid and supervise the uprooting of the plantation of Butandra trees there."

Scott looked at him for a moment incredulously. "I beg your pardon, sir?" he said at last in a neutral tone.

"I said, I want you to go to Cassid and supervise the uprooting of the plantation of Butandra trees there."

"I—sir, what is the reason for this order?"

"Because I say so."

"But, Mr. Hobbs, the Butandra trees are unique. As you of course know, there is nothing like them anywhere else in the universe. Scientifically it would be criminal to destroy those trees."

"Further than that, they play a considerable role in Cassidan planetary life. To the inhabitants the trees have a large emotional significance. I must ask you, sir, to reconsider your decision."

"You have your orders. Carry them out."

"I'm sorry, sir. I decline to do so."

Hobbs' thick neck had turned red. "I'll have your job for this," he said chokingly.

Scott permitted himself a thin smile. "I have civil service tenure, sir," he said. "You can be removed for cause. Insubordination, in this case."

Scott's smile vanished, but he did not retreat. "Very well," he said. "If it comes to a public hearing we'll see. In any case I can't carry out that order. And I very much doubt, Mr. Hobbs, that you'll find anyone who will. It's not the kind of thing you can ask of a forester."

HOBBS raised his stick of Butandra wood. His expression was murderous. Then his common sense reasserted itself. He gave Scott a nod and left.

He called the travel bureau, canceled his Earthward passage and made reservations for a cabin on the next ship back to Cassid. If he could not find anyone to carry out his orders to destroy the plantation of Butandra trees he would do it himself. Tiglath Hobbs, as has been said before, was a stubborn man.

The trip back to Cassid was unexceptional. Nothing came to rap at Hobbs' viewing pane or to peer in at him. It was so quiet, in fact, that Hobbs had fits of wondering whether he was doing the right thing.

The Butandra trees were, as Scott had said, of considerable scientific interest and Hobbs might be letting himself in for a good deal of unfavorable criticism by destroying them. And the attack on Thorwald might have been only a coincidence.

But by now Hobbs bitterly hated the Butandra trees. Guilt, anxiety and self-righteousness had coalesced in him to form an emotion of overwhelming intensity. He hated the Butandra trees. How could there be any question about destroying them?

With their repulsive staring white bark and the nasty whispering rustle their long green leaves made they deserved—yes, they positively deserved—to be killed. How could a decent-minded man let the Butandra trees live?

Usually, by the time he got to this point in his thoughts, Hobbs began to pant. He had to make a conscious effort to calm himself.

Hobbs' ship docked at Genlis spaceport late at night. Hobbs was too excited to try to sleep. He paced up and down in the waiting room until day came.

Then he rented a 'copter from a Fly-It-Yourself hangarage and flew to a supply house which specialized in compact power saws. He had decided to fell the trees first and afterwards make arrangements for having the stumps pulled up.

It was still early when he got to the sacred grove. In the tender light of morning the straight, white-barked, green-leaved trees made a pretty, peaceful sight. Hobbs hesitated, though not from any qualms about his contemplated arboricide. What was bothering him was a feeling that entering the grove to cut down the trees, even in daylight, might be dangerous.

On the other hand the best defense was always attack. What had happened to Thorwald had been almost certainly a coincidence. But if it hadn't—Hobbs swallowed—the best way of insuring himself against a similar experience was to cut down the grove.

The grove was, he had decided on Llewellyn, the—the thing's base of operations. It drew power from the grove as surely as the trees of the grove drew nourishment from the soil. Once the grove was destroyed the thing, whether or not the force field had killed it, would have no more power.

Hobbs took the portable saw from the 'copter and slung it over his shoulder. He hesitated a fraction of a second longer. A sudden gust of wind set the long leaves of the Butandras to rustling mockingly. Hobbs felt a nearly blinding surge of hate. His jaw set. He opened the gate and entered the grove.

The power saw was not heavy and he decided to begin his felling operations beside the sapling he had first cut down. He found the stump without difficulty and was pleased to see that it had not put up any shoots. But somebody had dug a deep hole in the ground beside it, and Hobbs frowned over this.

He set the saw down on the turf and knelt to adjust it. He could find out about the hole later. He touched a switch. The saw's motor began to purr.

The Gardener came out from behind a tree and smiled at him.

Hobbs gave a strangled, inarticulate

shriek. He scrambled to his knees and started to run. The Gardener stretched out its lanky arms and caught him easily.

WITH its little pink mole hands it stripped his clothing away. His shoes came off. With ten separate chops of its strong white teeth the Gardener bit away his toes. While Hobbs struggled and shrieked and shrieked and shrieked, the Gardener peeled away the skin on the inner surfaces of his legs and thighs and bound these members together with a length of vine.

It drew scratches all over the surface of his body with its long sharp mole claws and rubbed a gritty grayish pow-

der carefully into each gash. Then it carried Hobbs over to the hole it had made and, still smiling, planted him.

When the Gardener came back an hour or so later from its tasks of cultivation in another part of the grove, a thin crust of bark had already begun to form over Hobbs' human frame. It would not be long, the Gardener knew, before Hobbs would become a quite satisfactory *Butandra* tree.

The Gardener smiled benignly. It looked with approval at the graft on the trunk of the tree to the right, where what had once been Eins Thorwald's index finger was burgeoning luxuriantly.

The Gardener nodded. "A leaf for a leaf," it said.



Wonder Oddities

WHAT sound waves look like is no longer a mystery. Thanks to modern plane manufacturers' high-velocity wind-tunnels and stroboscopic cameras, Drs. R. Bowling Barnes and Charles J. Burton have been able to record ultrasonic phenomena visually.

OVER-ACID internal conditions are offered a new cure by Dr. Norman Simon of Mount Sinai Hospital of New York City. He has proposed a cure for stomach ulcers which consists of lowering a deflated balloon coated with phosphorus into the patient's stomach and there pumping it up. As if ulcers aren't bad enough!

NEW Geiger counters are currently aiding the prospectors' search for uranium in the western part of this country and Canada. Thanks to discovering new techniques for reducing the size of the register coil, the Canadian National Research Council has come up with a radiation indicator that weighs only one pound.

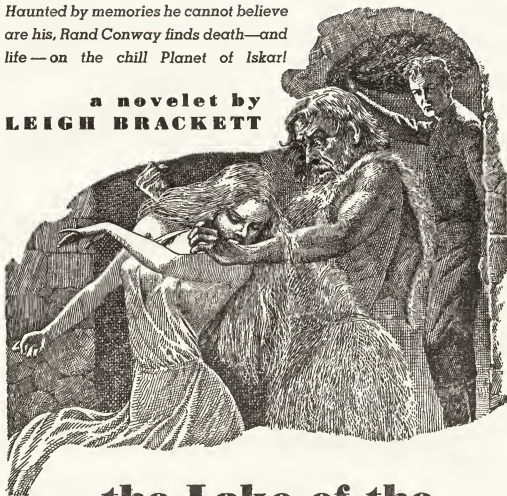
DUCKS are facing a new menace—which results from spring muskrat trapping, according to Jay S. Gashwiler of the Maine Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit. It seems that many of the birds get caught in muskrat traps at the very beginning of the breeding season.

EVEN the contented bovine who supplies us with milk, butter, cheese and steak is a frequent sufferer from ailing teeth. Dr. L. M. Hurt, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association, believes that a few trips to the dentist will give profit in better milk yield.

REDUCTION in size that defies the speculation of anthropologists has occurred over the last two centuries in the descendants of the Mayas in Central America. This strange loss of height amounts to an average of almost two inches for the two-hundred-year period.

*Haunted by memories he cannot believe
are his, Rand Conway finds death—and
life—on the chill Planet of Iskar!*

**a novelet by
LEIGH BRACKETT**



the Lake of the GONE FOREVER

CHAPTER 1

Landing on Iskar

IN his cabin aboard the spaceship *Rohan*, Rand Conway slept—and dreamed.

He stood in a narrow valley. On both sides the cliffs of ice rose up, sheer and high and infinitely beautiful out of the powdery snow. The darkling air was full of whirling motes of frost, like the

dust of diamonds, and overhead the shining pinnacles stood clear against a sky of deepest indigo, spangled with great stars.

As always the place was utterly strange to Conway and yet, somehow, not strange at all. He began to walk forward through the drifting snow and

he seemed almost to know what he was seeking around the bend of the valley.

Fear came upon him then but he could not stop.

And as always in that icy place his dead father stood waiting. He stood just as he had years ago, on the night he died, and he spoke slowly and sadly the words he had spoken then to his uncomprehending small son.

"I can never go back to Iskar, to the Lake of the Gone Forever."

Tears dropped slowly from under the closed lids of his eyes and the echo went to and fro between the cliffs, saying, "... Lake of the Gone Forever ... Gone Forever ..."

Conway crept on, trembling. Above him the golden stars wheeled in the dark blue sky and the beauty of them was evil and the shimmering turrets of the ice were full of lurking laughter.

He passed into the shadows under the sheathed rocks that hid the end of the valley and as he did so the dead man



cried out in a voice of agony, "I can never go back to Iskar!"

And the cliffs caught up the name and shouted it thunderously through the dream.

Iskar! Iskar!

Rand Conway started up in his bunk, broad awake, shaken and sweating as always by the strangeness of that vision. Then his hands closed hard on the edge of the bunk and he laughed.

"You couldn't go back," he whispered to the man dead twenty years. "But I'm going. By heaven, I'm going, at last!"

It seemed to him that the very fabric of the ship murmured the name as it rushed into deep space, that the humming machines purred it, that the thundering jets bellowed it.

Iskar! Iskar!

A savage triumph rose in Conway. So many times he had awakened from that dream to hopelessness—the hopelessness of ever reaching his goal. So many times,

in these years of hard dangerous space-man's toil, the lost little world that meant power and riches had seemed remote beyond attainment.

But he had hung on, too stubborn ever quite to give up. He had waited and planned and hoped until finally he had made his chance. And he was on his way now to the place that his father had lost and never regained.

"Iskar!"

CONWAY started up, his face swiftly losing its brooding look. That wasn't just an echo of his dream. Someone was shouting the name outside his cabin door.

"Conway! Rand Conway! We've sighted *Iskar!*"

Of course! Why else would the jets be thundering? He had been half asleep still, not to know it at once. He sprang up and crossed the dimly-lighted cabin, a tall man, very lean and hard, yet with a certain odd grace about him, a certain beauty in the modeling of his bones. His eyes, of a color somewhere between grey and blue, were brilliant with excitement and full of a wolfish hunger.

He flung open the door. The glare from the corridor set him to blinking painfully—an inherited sensitivity to light was his one weakness and he had often cursed his father for passing it on to him. Through a dancing haze he saw Peter Esmond's mild good-looking face, as excited as his own.

Esmond said something, but Conway neither heard it nor cared what it was. He pushed past him and went with long strides down the passage and up the ladder to the observation bridge.

It was dark up there under the huge port. Immediately everything came clear to his vision—the blue-black sky of the Asteroid Belt, full of flashing golden stars where the little worlds caught the light of the distant Sun.

And ahead, dead ahead, he saw the tiny misty globe that was Iskar.

He stood for a long time, staring at it, and he neither moved nor spoke except that a deep trembling ran through him.

Close beside him he heard Charles Rohan's deep voice. "Well, there's the new world. Quite a thrill, eh?"

Instantly Conway was on his guard. Rohan was no fool. A man does not make forty million dollars by being a fool



The girl fell and the cold
fires of the lake boiled
up and overwhelmed her

and it was going to be hard enough to get away with this without tipping his hand to Rohan now.

Inwardly he cursed, not Rohan, but his daughter Marcia.

It was she who had talked her father into going along to see about opening up trade with Iskar. Rohan controlled the lion's share of trade with the Jovian Moons and the idea was logical enough. Marcia's interest, naturally, was not financial. It was simply that she could not bear to be parted from Esmond and there was no other way for her to go with him.

Conway glanced at Marcia, who was standing with her arm around her fiancé. A nice girl. A pretty girl. Ordinarily he would have liked her. But she didn't belong here and neither did Rohan—not for Conway's purposes.

Esmond alone he could have handled easily. Esmond was the Compleat Ethnologist to his fingertips. As long as he had a brand-new race to study and catalogue he would neither know nor care what other treasures a world might hold.

Now that he looked back on it the whole chain of circumstances seemed flimsy and unsure to Conway—his meeting with Esmond on a deep-space flight from Jupiter, the sudden inspiration when he learned of Esmond's connection with the Rohans, the carefully casual campaign to get the ethnologist interested in the unknown people of Iskar, the final business of producing his father's fragmentary notes to drive Esmond quite mad with longing to see this inhabited world that only one other Earthman had ever seen.

Esmond to Marcia Rohan, Marcia to her father—and now here they were. Esmond was going to get a Fellowship in the Interplanetary Society of Ethnologists and Rand Conway was going to get what he had lusted for ever since he had stumbled upon his father's notes and read in them the story of what lay in the Lake of the Gone Forever, waiting to be picked up by the first strong pair of hands.

That portion of the notes he had never shown to anyone.

Here they were, plunging out of the sky toward Iskar, and it had all been so easy—too easy. Conway was a space-man and therefore superstitious, whether he liked it or not. He had a sudden

feeling that he was going to have to pay for that easiness before he got through.

ESMOND had pressed forward in the cramped space, staring raptly out at the distant glittering of silver light that was Iskar.

"I wonder what they're like?" he said as he had said a million times before. Marcia smiled.

"You'll soon know," she answered.

"It is odd," said Rohan, "that your father didn't tell more about the people of Iskar, Conway. His notes were strangely fragmentary — almost as though he had written much more and then destroyed it."

Conway tried to detect an edge of suspicion in Rohan's voice, but could not.

"Perhaps he did," said Conway. "I never could find any more."

With that one exception it was the truth.

Marcia's face was thoughtful and a little sad, in the dim glow of that outer sky.

"I've read those notes over and over again," she said. "I think you're right, Dad. I think Mr. Conway wrote his whole heart into those notes and then destroyed them because he couldn't bear to have them read, even by his son."

She put a sympathetic hand on Conway's arm.

"I can understand your wanting to know, Rand. I hope you'll find your answer."

"Thanks," said Conway gravely.

He had had to account for his own interest in Iskar and he had been able to do that too without lying except by omission. The story of his father was true enough—the dark brooding man, broken in health and spirit, living alone with a child and a dream. He had died before Rand was ten, by his own hand and with the name of Iskar on his lips. *I can never go back, to the Lake of the Gone Forever!*

Conway himself had never doubted what his father's secret tragedy was. He had found a fortune on Iskar and had not been able to go back to claim it. That was enough to drive any man mad.

But it was easy, out of his childhood memories and those strangely incoherent notes, to build a romantic mystery around the lonely prospector's discovery of an unknown world and his subse-

quent haunted death. Marcia had found it all fascinating and did not doubt for a moment Conway's statement that he was seeking to solve that mystery which, he said, had overshadowed his whole life.

And it had. Waking or sleeping, Rand Conway could not forget Iskar and the Lake of the Gone Forever.

He watched the misty globe grow larger in the sky ahead, and the beating of his heart was a painful thing. Already his hands ached with longing to close around Iskar and wring from it the power and the wealth that would repay him for all the bitter years of waiting.

He thought of his dream. It was always unpleasantly vivid, and remained with him for hours after he woke. But this time it was different. He thought of the vision of his father, standing in the crystal valley, alone with his dark sorrow, and he said to the vision, *You should have waited. You should have had the courage to wait, like me.*

For the first time he was not sorry for his father.

Then he forgot his father. He forgot time and Esmond and the Rohans. He forgot everything but Iskar.

The *Rohan* shuddered rhythmically to the brake-blasts. Iskar filled the port, producing a skyline of shimmering pinnacles so like his dream that Conway shuddered too in spite of himself.

The pinnacles shot up swiftly into a wall of ice and the *Rohan* swept in to a landing.

CHAPTER II

The White City

THE spaceship lay like a vast black whale, stranded on a spotless floe. Behind it the ice-wall rose, its upper spires carved by the wind into delicate fantastic shapes. Spreading away from it to the short curve of the horizon was a sloping plain of snow, broken here and there by gleaming tors. In the distance other ranges lifted sharply against the deep dark blue of the sky.

Rand Conway stood apart from the others. His face had a strange look. He slipped the warm hood back, lifting his head in the icy wind.

Great golden stars wheeled overhead and the air was full of dancing motes of frost. The wind played with the powdery snow, whirling it up into shining veils, smoothing it again into curious patterns of ripples.

The plain, the sky, the frozen spires, had a wondrous beauty of color, infinitely soft and subtle. There was no glare here to plague Conway's eyes. Iskar glimmered in a sort of misty twilight, like the twilight of a dream.

Iskar—the bulk of it solid under his feet at last after all these years. Conway trembled and found it difficult to breathe. His eyes, black and luminous as a cat's now with the expansion of the pupils, glistened with a hard light. Iskar!

Quite suddenly he was afraid.

Fear rushed at him out of the narrow valleys, down from the singing peaks. It came in the wind and rose up from the snow under his feet. It wrapped him in a freezing shroud and for a moment reality slipped away from him and he was lost.

The shadows were deep under the icy cliffs and the mouths of the valleys were black and full of whispers. It seemed to him that the lurking terror of his dream was very close, close and waiting.

He must have made some sound or sign, for Marcia Rohan came to him and took him by the arm.

"Rand," she said. "Rand, what is it?"

He caught hold of her. In a moment everything was normal again and he was able to force what might pass for a laugh.

"I don't know," he said. "Something came to me just then." He could not tell her about the dream. He told her instead what he knew must be the cause of it.

"My father must have told me something about this place when I was a child, something I can't remember. Something ugly. I—" He paused and then plunged on. "I thought for a moment that I had been here before, that I knew . . ."

He stopped. The shadow was gone now. To the devil with dreams and subconscious memories. The reality was all that mattered—the reality that was going to make Rand Conway richer than the Rohans. He stared away across the plain. For a moment his face was unguarded and Marcia was startled by

the brief cruel look of triumph that crossed it.

The others came up, Rohan and young Esmond and Captain Frazer, the well-fed but very competent skipper of the *Rohan*. They were all shivering slightly in spite of their warm coveralls. Esmond looked at Conway, who was still bare-headed.

"You'll freeze your ears off," he said.

Conway laughed, not without a faint edge of contempt. "If you had kicked around in deep space as many years as I have you wouldn't be bothered by a little cold."

He pointed off to where the distant ranges were, across the plain.

"According to my father's maps the village, or what have you, lies between those ranges."

"I think," said Marcia, "that we had better break out the sledges and go before Peter bursts something."

Esmond laughed. He was obviously trembling with eagerness.

"I hope nothing's happened to them," he said. "I mean, since your father was here. You know—famine, plague or anything."

"I imagine they're a pretty hardy lot," said Rohan, "or they couldn't have survived at all in this godforsaken place." He turned to Frazer, laughing. "For heaven's sake, get the sledges."

FRAZER nodded. The crew had come tumbling out and were rollicking like schoolboys in the snow, glad to be released from the long confinement of the voyage. The Second Officer and the engineer were coming up and Frazer went to meet them. The Second turned back to round up his men.

The sledges came presently out of the cargo hatch. There were three of the light plastic hulls—two to carry the exploring party, one to be left with the ship in case of emergency. They were fully equipped, including radio and the efficient Samson riot guns, firing shells of anaesthetic gas.

Rohan looked at his daughter. "I want you to stay here, Marcia."

The girl must have been expecting that, Conway thought, because her only reaction was to set her jaw so that she looked ridiculously like her father—smaller and prettier but even more stubborn.

"No," said Marcia.

Esmond said, "Please, darling. These people may not be friendly at first. You can go next time."

"No," said Marcia.

"Marcia," said Rohan pleasantly, "I don't want any foolishness about this. Go with Frazer, back to the ship."

Marcia studied him. Then she turned and kissed Esmond lightly on the cheek and said, "Good luck, darling." She went off with Frazer. Conway saw that there were tears in her eyes. He warned to Marcia. She hadn't been trying to show off. She just wanted to be with Esmond in case anything happened.

Rohan said, "I guess we might as well go."

They climbed in, six men to a sledge, all burly spacehands with the exception of Rohan and the ethnologist and Conway, who had sweated his way up from the ranks to Master Pilot.

The small jets hissed, roared and settled down to a steady thrumming. The sledges shot out across the trackless plain like two small boats on a white sea, throwing up waves of snowy spray.

Conway was in the leading sledge. He leaned forward, like a leashed hound, impatient to be slipped. Part of him was mad with excitement and another part, completely cool and detached, was making plans.

The spaceship began to grow smaller. Almost imperceptibly the gleaming pinnacles of ice lengthened into the sky.

Presently the pace of the sledges grew slower and slower still. Tors, half rock, half ice, rose up out of the snow and here and there a reef, mailed and capped with the shining armor, was scoured clear by the wind. The man at the controls thrust his head forward, squinting.

"What's the matter?" asked Conway. "Why the delay?"

The man said irritably, "I'm afraid of ramming into something, sir. It's so bloody dark and shadowy, I can't see."

"Is that all?" Conway laughed and shoved him aside. "Here—let an owl do it."

He took the controls and sent the sledge spinning ahead. Every reef and tor, every ripple in the snow, was as clear to him as it would have been to most men in broad daylight. He laughed again.

"I'm beginning to like Iskar," he said to Rohan. "I think I'll start a colony for

people with hemeralopia, and we can all be as happy as bats in the dark. My father must have loved it here."

Rohan glanced up at him. Conway had forgotten to put his hood back up. The wind was whipping an icy gale through his hair and there was rime on his lashes. He seemed to be enjoying it. Rohan shivered.

"I'm nyctalopic myself," he said. "I'll stick to plenty of sunlight—and heat!"

Esmond did not bother to listen to either one of them. His dream was as strong as Conway's and at this moment he had room for nothing else.

The sledges rushed on across the plain, the one following the tiny jet-flares of the other. The spaceship was lost in the white distance behind them. Ahead the twin ranges grew against the stars. Nothing stirred but the wind. It was very lovely, very peaceful, Conway thought. A cold, sweet jewel of a world.

The words sang in his ears, the words that had themed his father's death and run through his own life as a promise and a challenge. "The Lake of the Gone Forever—Gone Forever . . ."

He had long ago ceased to wonder what that name meant. Only in his nightmare dream did it have the power to frighten him. He wanted what was there and nothing else mattered.

The Lake of the Gone Forever. Soon—soon—soon!

Yet it seemed a very long time to Conway before they entered the broad defile between the twin ranges.

He was forced to slow his breakneck pace because here the ground was broken and treacherous. Finally he stopped altogether.

"We'll have to go on foot from here," he said.

IN a fever of impatience he waited while the men climbed out, shouldering the Samson guns. They left two to guard the sledges and went on, scrambling in single file over the tumbled rocks. The wind howled between the mountain walls so that the air was blind with snow. There was no sight of the city.

Conway was in the lead. He was like a man driven by fiends. Where the others slipped and stumbled he went over the rough ground like a cat, swift and sure-footed even among the deceptive drifts. Several times he was forced

to stop and wait lest he leave the party too far behind.

Suddenly, above the organ notes of the wind, there was another sound.

Conway lifted his head to listen. Clear and sweet and strong he heard the winding of horns from the upper slopes. They echoed away down the valley, calling one to the other with ringing voices that stirred Conway's blood to a wild excitement. He shook the snow out of his hair and plunged on, leaving the rest to follow as best they could.

A jutting shoulder of the mountains loomed before him. The wind blew and the deep-throated horns called and called again across the valley. The blown drifts leaped at him and the icy screes were a challenge to his strength but they could not slow him down. He laughed and went on around the shoulder and saw the white city glittering under the stars.

It spread across the valley floor and up the slopes as though it grew from the frozen earth, a part of it, as enduring as the mountains. At Conway's first glance, it seemed to be built all of ice, its turrets and crenellations glowing with a subtle luminescence in the dusky twilight, fantastically shaped, dusted here and there with snow. From the window openings came a glow of pearly light.

Beyond the city the twin ranges drew in and in until their flanks were parted only by a thin line of shadow, a narrow valley with walls of ice reaching up to the sky.

Conway's heart contracted with a fiery pang.

A narrow valley—*The valley.*

For a moment everything vanished in a roaring darkness. Dream and reality rushed together—his father's notes, his father's dying cry, his own waking visions and fearful wanderings beyond the wall of sleep.

It lies beyond the city, in a narrow place between the mountains—The Lake of the Gone Forever. And I can never go back!

Conway said aloud to the wind and the snow and the crying horns, "But I have come back. I have come!"

Exulting, triumphant, he looked again at the city, the white beauty of it, the wind-carved towers bright beneath the golden stars.

It was a strong place, walled and for-

tified against whatever enemies there might be on this world of Iskar. Conway ran toward it and as he did so the braying of horns rose louder and then was joined by the shrill war-cry of pipes.

They went skirling along the wall and through the snow-mist he saw that men were there above him looking down. The glitter of their spears ran like a broken line of silver from both sides of the great stone gate.

CHAPTER III

The Fear

CONWAY'S blood leaped hot within him. The pipes set him mad and he flung up his arm and shouted at the men, a long hail. He could see them clearly now. They were tall lean men with bodies tough as rawhide and strong bone in their faces and eyes like the eyes of eagles. They wore the white furs of beasts killed about them, thrown loosely over their naked shoulders, and they were bareheaded and careless of the cold.

Their spears rose up and menaced him.

He stopped. Once again he cried out, a cry as wild and shrill as the martial pipes. Then he stood still, waiting.

Slowly behind him came Rohan and the others. They formed into a sort of knot around him. Some of the men reached nervously for their riot guns and Rohan spoke sharply. The pipes fell silent and the sounding horns. They waited, all of them.

There was movement on the wall and an old man came forward among the warriors, a cragged gnarled old man with a proud face and fierce eyes, standing strong as a granite rock.

He looked down at the alien men below him. His hair and his long beard blew in the bitter wind, and the white furs whipped around him, and for a long time he did not speak. His eyes met Conway's and there was hatred in them and deep pain.

Finally he said, very slowly, as though the words came haltingly from some long-locked vault of memory, "Men of Earth!"

Conway started. It had not occurred to him that his father might have left some knowledge of English behind him.

"Yes," he answered, holding out his empty hands. "Friends."

The old man shook his head. "No. Go, or we kill."

He looked again at Conway, very strangely, and a little chill ran through the Earthman. Was it possible that the old man saw in him some resemblance to the Conway he had known before? He and his father had not looked alike.

Esmond stepped forward. "Please," he said. "We mean no harm. We only want to talk to you. We will obey you, we will bring no weapons—only let us in!"

He was very like a child pleading, almost on the verge of tears. It was unthinkable that he should be denied now.

The old man said again, "Go."

Rohan spoke. "We have gifts, many things for your people. We want nothing. We come as friends."

The old man flung up his head and laughed, and his mirth was like vitriol poured on the wind.

"Friend! Conna was my friend. In my house, as my own son, lived Conna, my friend!"

He cried out something in his own harsh tongue and Conway knew that it was a curse and he knew that Conna was his own name. They had not forgotten his father on Iskar, it seemed.

He was suddenly angry, more terribly angry than he had ever been in his life. Beyond the city, almost within reach, lay the valley of the Lake and nothing, not all their spears, not death itself, was going to stop him now.

He strode up under the wall and looked at the old man with eyes as black and baleful as his own.

"We know nothing of this Conna," he said. "We come in peace. But if you want war we will make war. If you kill us others will come—many others. Our ship is huge and very terrible. Its fire alone can destroy your city. Will you let us in, old man, or must we . . ."

After a long time the other said slowly, "What is your name?"

"Rand," said Conway.

"Rand," repeated the old man softly. "Rand." He was silent for a time, brooding, his chin sunk on his breast. His eyes were hooded and he did not look again at Conway.

Abruptly he turned and issued orders in his own tongue. Then, to the Earthmen, he shouted, "Enter!"

The great stone was rolled away.

Conway went back to the others. Both Esmond and Rohan were furious.

"Who gave you the right—" Rohan began, and Esmond broke in passionately.

"You shouldn't have threatened them! A little more talk would have convinced them."

Conway looked at them contemptuously.

"You wanted in, didn't you?" he demanded. "All right, the gate's open and they'll think twice about getting tough with us after we're through it."

HE unbuckled his gun belt and tossed it, holster and all, to a man on the wall. It was a gesture and no more because he had hidden a small anaesthetic needle-gun under his coverall in case of need—but it would look good to the Iskarians.

"I'd do the same if I were you," he said to the others. "Also, I would send the men back. They're not going to do us any good inside the wall and they might do us harm. Tell them to bring the trade goods and one of the radios from the sledges and then return to the ship—and stand by."

Rohan scowled. He did not like having the command taken from him. But Conway's orders made sense and he relayed them. Then he tossed his own gun to one of the warriors. Esmond did not carry one. The men went away, back to the sledges.

"Remember," said Conway, "you never heard of 'Conna', or his son."

The others nodded. They turned then and went into the city and the stone gate was closed behind them.

The old man was waiting for them, and with him a sort of honor guard of fifteen tall fighting men.

"I am Krah," said the old patriarch. He waited politely until Esmond and Rohan had said their names and then he said, "Come."

The guard formed up. The Earthmen went—half guest, half captive—into the streets of the city.

They were narrow winding streets, rambling up and down over the broken ground. In some places they were scoured clean to the ice by the whistling

wind, in others they were choked by drifts. Conway could see now that the buildings were all of solid stone, over which the cold shining mail had formed for centuries, except where the openings were kept clear.

The people of the city were gathered to watch as the strangers went by.

It was a strangely silent crowd. Men, women and children, old and young, all of them as stalwart and handsome as mountain trees, with their wide black pupils and pale hair, the men clad in skins, the women in kirtles of rough woolen cloth. Conway noticed that the women and children did not mingle with the men.

Silent, all of them, and watching. There was something disquieting in their stillness. Then, somewhere, an old woman sent up a keening cry of lament, and another took it up, and another, until the eerie *ochone* echoed through the twisting streets as though the city itself wept in pain.

The men began to close in. Slowly at first, now one stepping forward, now another, like the first pebbles rolling before the rush of the avalanche. Conway's heart began to pound and there was a bitter taste in his mouth.

Esmond cried out to the old man, "Tell them not to fear us! Tell them we are friends!"

Krah looked at him and smiled. His eyes went then to Conway and he smiled again.

"I will tell them," he said.

"Remember," said Conway harshly. "Remember the great ship and its fires."

Krah nodded. "I will not forget."

He spoke to the people, shouting aloud, and reluctantly the men drew back and rested the butts of their spears on the ground. The women did not cease to wail.

Conway cursed his father for the things he had not written in his notes.

Quite suddenly, out of a steep side lane, a herd boy drove his flock with a scramble and a clatter. The queer white-furred beasts milled in the narrow space, squealing, filling the air with their sharp, not unpleasant odor.

As though that pungency were a trigger, a shutter clicked open somewhere in Conway's mind and he knew that he had seen these streets before, known the sounds and smells of the city, lis-

tened to the harsh staccato speech. The golden wheeling of the stars overhead hurt him with a poignant familiarity.

Conway plunged again into that limbo between fact and dream. It was far worse this time. He wanted to sink down and cling to something until his mind steadied again but he did not dare do anything but walk behind the old man as though nothing on Iskar could frighten him.

Yet he was afraid—afraid with the fear of madness, where the dream becomes the reality.

Beads of sweat came out on his face and froze there. He dug his nails into his palms and forced himself to remember his whole life, back to his earliest memory and beyond, when his father must have talked and talked of Iskar, obsessed with the thought of what he had found there and lost again.

He had not spoken so much of Iskar when his son was old enough to understand. But it seemed that the damage was already done. The formative years, the psychologists call them, when the things learned and forgotten will come back to haunt one later on.

Conway was a haunted man, walking through that strange city. And old Krah watched him sidelong and smiled and would not be done with smiling.

The women wailed, howling like she-wolves to the dark heavens.

CHAPTER IV

"Go Ask of Her . . ."

IT seemed like centuries to Conway, but it could not have been so long in actual time before Krah stopped beside a doorway and pulled aside the curtain of skins that covered it.

"Enter," he said and the Earthmen filed through, leaving the guard outside, except for five who followed the old man.

"My sons," said Krah.

All grown men, far older than Conway, and scarred, tough-handed warriors. Yet they behaved toward Krah with the deference of children.

The ground floor of the house was used for storage. Frozen sides of meat and bundles of a dried moss-like stuff

occupied one side. On the other was a pen and a block for butchering. Apparently there was no wood on Iskar, for the pen was built of stone and there were no doors, only the heavy curtains.

Krah lifted another one of these, leading the way up a closed stair that served as a sort of airlock to keep out the draughts and the extreme cold of the lower floor. The upper chamber was freezing by any Earthly standards but a small, almost smokeless fire of moss burned on the round hearth and the enormously thick walls were perfect insulation against the wind. Immediately Conway began to sweat, probably from sheer nervousness.

A girl sat by the hearth, tending the spit and the cooking pot. Obviously she had only just run back in from the street, for there was still snow in her silvery hair and her sandals were wet with it.

She did not lift her head when the men came in, as though such happenings were not for her to notice. Yet Conway caught a sidelong glance of her eyes. In the soft light of the stone lamps her pupils had contracted to show the clear blue iris, and for all her apparent meekness, he saw that her eyes were bright and rebellious and full of spirit. Conway smiled.

She met his gaze fairly for a moment with a curious intensity, as though she would tear away his outer substance and see everything that lay beneath it—his heart, his soul, his innermost thoughts, greedily, all in a minute. Then the old man spoke and she was instantly absorbed in the turning of the spit.

"Sit," said Krah, and the Earthmen sat on heaps of furs spread over cushions of moss.

The five tall sons sat also but Krah remained standing.

"So you know nothing of Conna," he said and Conna's son answered blandly, "No."

"Then how came you to Iskar?"

Conway shrugged. "How did Conna come? The men of Earth go everywhere." Unconsciously he had slipped into Krah's ceremonial style of phrasing. He leaned forward, smiling.

"My words were harsh when I stood outside your gate. Let them be forgotten, for they were only the words of anger. Forget Conna also. He has nothing to do with us."

"Ah," said the old man softly. "Forget. That is a word I do not know. Anger, yes—and vengeance also. But not forget."

He turned to Rohan and Esmond and spoke to them and answered them courteously while they explained their wishes. But his gaze, frosty blue now in the light, rested broodingly on Conway's face and did not waver. Conway's nerves tightened and tightened and a great unease grew within him.

He could have sworn that Krah knew who he was and why he had come to Iskar.

Reason told him that this was ridiculous. It had been many years since Krah had seen his father and in any case they were physically dissimilar. Nor did it seem likely that he should have preserved intact any of his father's mannerisms.

Yet he could not be sure and the uncertainty preyed upon him. The old man's bitter gaze was hard to bear.

The five sons neither moved nor spoke. Conway was sure that they understood the conversation perfectly and he reflected that, according to Krah, they had lived with Conna as his brothers. They seemed to be waiting, quite patiently, as though they had waited a long time and could afford to wait a little longer.

From time to time the girl stole a secret smouldering look at Conway and in spite of his uneasiness he grew very curious about her, wondering what devil of unrest lurked in her mind. She had a fascinating little face, full of odd lights and shadows where the glow of the fire touched it.

"Trade," said Krah at last. "Friendship. Study. They are good words. Let us eat now, and then rest, and I will think of these good words, which I have heard before from Conna."

"Look here," said Rohan rather testily, "I don't know what Conna did here but I see no reason to condemn us for his sins."

"We speak the truth," said Esmond gently. He glanced at Conway, waiting for him to ask the question that was his to ask. But Conway could not trust himself and finally Esmond's curiosity drove him to blurt out,

"What was Conna's crime?"

The old man turned upon him a slow and heavy look.

"Do not ask of me," he said. "Ask of her who waits, by the Lake of the Gone Forever."

THAT name stung Conway's nerves like a whiplash. He was afraid he had betrayed himself but if he started no one seemed to notice. The faces of Esmond and Rohan were honestly blank.

"The Lake of the Gone Forever," Esmond repeated. "What is that?"

"Let there be an end to talk," said Krah.

He turned and spoke to the girl in his own tongue and Conway caught the name Ciel. She rose obediently and began to serve the men, bringing the food on platters of thin carved stone. When she was done she sat down again by the fire and ate her own dinner from what was left, a slim, humble shadow whose eyes were no more humble than the eyes of a young panther. Conway stole her a smile and was rewarded by a brief curving of her red mouth.

When the meal was finished Krah rose and led the Earthmen down a corridor. There were two curtained doorways on each side and beyond them were small windowless cells, with moss and furs heaped soft to make a sleeping place.

Ciel came quietly to light the stone lamps and it seemed to Conway that she took special note of the cubicle he chose for his own.

"Sleep," said Krah, and left them. Ciel vanished down a narrow back stair at the end of the hall.

The Earthmen stood for a moment, looking at each other, and then Conway said sullenly, "Don't ask me any questions because I don't know the answers."

He turned and went into his chamber, dropping the curtain behind him. In a vile mood he sat down on the furs and lighted a cigarette, listening to Rohan's low half-angry voice telling Esmond that he thought Rand was acting very strangely. Esmond answered soothingly that the situation would be a strain on anyone. Presently Conway heard them go to bed. He blew out his lamp.

He sat for quite awhile, in a terrible sweat of nerves, thinking of Krah, thinking of the narrow valley that lay so nearly within his reach, thinking of his father, hating him because of the

black memories he had left behind on Iskar, so that now the way was made very hard for his son.

Heaven help him if old Krah ever found out!

He waited for some time after everything was still. Then, very carefully, he lifted the curtain and stepped out into the hall.

He could see into the big main room. Four of Krah's brawny sons slept on the furs by the embers. The fifth sat crosslegged, his spear across his knees, and he did not sleep.

Conway glanced at the back stair. He was perfectly sure that it led to the women's quarters and that any venturing that way would bring the whole house around his ears. He shrugged and returned to his cell.

Stretched out on the furs he lay frowning into the dark, trying to think. He had not counted on the hatred of the Iskarians for Earthmen. He wondered for the hundredth time what his father had done to make all the women of Iskar wail a dirge when they were reminded of him. *Ask of her who waits, by the Lake of the Gone Forever . . .*

It didn't really matter. All that mattered was that they were under close watch and that it was a long way through the city for an Earthman to go and stay alive, even if he could get away from Krah.

Quite suddenly, he became aware that someone had crept down the hall outside and stopped at his door.

Without making a sound, Conway reached into the breast of his coverall and took hold of the gun that was hidden there. Then he waited.

The curtain moved a little, then a little more, and Conway lay still and breathed like a sleeping man. Faint light seeped in, outlining the widening gap of the curtain, showing clearly to Conway's eyes the figure that stood there, looking in.

Ciel, a little grey mouse in her hodden kirtle, her hair down around her shoulders like a cape of moonbeams. Ciel, the mouse with the wildcat's eyes.

Partly curious to see what she would do, partly afraid that a whisper might attract attention from the other room, Conway lay still, feigning sleep.

For a long moment the girl stood without moving, watching him. He could hear the sound of her breathing,

quick and soft. At last she took one swift step forward, then paused, as though her courage had failed her. That was her undoing.

The big man with the spear must have caught some flicker of movement, the swirl of her skirt, perhaps, for she had made no noise. Conway heard a short exclamation from the main room, and Ciel dropped the curtain and ran. A man's heavier footfalls pelted after her.

There was a scuffling at the other end of the hall and some low intense whispering. Conway crept over and pulled the curtain open a crack.

KRAH'S son held the girl fast. He seemed to be lecturing her, more in sorrow than in anger, and then, deliberately and without heat, he began to beat her. Ciel bore it without a whimper but her eyes glazed and her face was furious.

Conway stepped silently out into the hall. The man's back was turned, but Ciel saw him. He indicated in pantomime what she should do and she caught the idea at once—or perhaps only the courage to do it.

Twisting like a cat, she set her teeth hard in the arm that held her.

The man let her go from sheer astonishment rather than pain. She fled down the woman-stair and he stood staring after her, his mouth wide open, as dumbfounded as though the innocent stones he walked on had risen suddenly and attacked him. Conway got the feeling that such a thing had never happened before in the history of Iskar.

He leaned lazily against the wall and said aloud, "What's going on?"

Krah's son turned swiftly and the look of astonishment was replaced instantly by anger.

Conway made a show of yawning, as though he had just waked up. "Was that Ciel you were thrashing? She's a pretty big girl to be spanked." He grinned at the marks on the man's arm. "By the way, who is she—Krah's granddaughter?"

The answer came slowly in stumbling but understandable English.

"Krah's fostering, daughter of my sister's friend. Ciel drank wickedness with mother's milk—wickedness she learn from my sister, who learn from Conna."

Quite suddenly the big man reached out and took Conway's jacket-collar in a throttling grip. Amazingly there were tears in his eyes and a deep, bitter rage.

"I will warn you, man of Earth," he said softly. "Go—go swiftly while you still live."

He flung Conway from him and turned away, back to the big room to brood again by the fire. And the Earthman was left to wonder whether the warning was for them all or for himself alone.

Hours later he managed to fall into an uneasy sleep, during which he dreamed again of the icy valley and the hidden terror that waited for him beyond the wall of rock. It seemed closer to him than ever before, so close that he awoke with a strangled cry. The stone cell was like a burial vault, and he left it, in a mood of desperation such as he had never known before. Outside, the wind was rising.

He came into the big room just as Krah entered from the outer stair. Behind him, very white-faced and proud, came Marcia Rohan. Her cheek was bleeding and her lovely dark hair was wet and draggled and her eyes hurt Conway to look at them.

"Marcia!" he cried and she ran to him, clinging with tight hands like a frightened child. He held her, answering her question before she could gasp it out.

"Peter's safe," he said. "So is your father. They're quite safe."

Old Krah spoke. There was a strange stony quality about him now, as though he had come to some decision from which nothing could shake him. He looked at Conway.

"Go," he said. "Call your—friends."

CHAPTER V

Warrior of Iskar

CONWAY went, taking Marcia with him. Rohan came out at once but Esmond was sleeping like the dead. Apparently he had worked for hours by the light of the stone lamp, making notes on the people of Iskar.

Conway wondered, as he shook him awake, whether any of that data was

going to get safely back to Earth. He knew, as certainly as he knew his own name, that their stay here was ended and he did not like the look in Krah's eyes.

"It's nobody's fault," Marcia was saying, over and over. "I couldn't stand it. I didn't know whether you were alive or dead. Your radio didn't answer. I stole a sledge."

"Did you come alone?" asked Rohan. "Yes."

"My God!" said Esmond softly, and picked her up in his arms. She laid her bleeding cheek against his and sobbed out, "They stoned me, Peter, the women did. The men brought me through the streets and the women stoned me."

Esmond's mild face became perfectly white. His eyes turned cold as the snow outside. He strode down the hall bearing Marcia in his arms, and his very step was stiff with fury. Rohan followed, crowding on his heels.

Old Krah never gave them a chance to speak. His five sons were ranged behind him and there was something very formidable about them, the five tall fair men and the tall old one who was like an ancient dog-wolf, white with years but still leader of the pack.

Krah held up his hand, and the Earthmen stopped. From her place by the fire Conway saw that Ciel was watching, staring with fascinated eyes at the alien woman who had come alone across the snow-fields to stand beside her men. The wind piped loud in the window embrasures, coming down from the high peaks with a rush and a snarl that set Conway's nerves to quivering with a queer excitement.

Krah spoke, looking at Marcia.

"For this I am sorry," he said. "But the woman should not have come." His frosty gaze rose then to take in all of them. "I offer you your lives. Go now—leave the city, leave Iskar and never return. If you do not I cannot save you."

"Why did they stone her?" demanded Esmond. He had one thing on his mind, no room for any other thought.

"Because she is different," said Krah simply, "and they fear her. She wears the garments of a man and she walks among men and these things are against their beliefs. Now, will you go?"

Esmond set the girl on her feet beside him, leaving his arm around her shoulders.

"We will go," he said. "And I will kill the first one who touches her."

Krah was gentleman enough to ignore the emptiness of that very sincere threat. He bowed his head.

"That," he said, "is as it should be."

He looked at Rohan.

"Don't worry," Rohan snapped.

"We'll leave and may you all go to the devil. This is a fit world for wolves and only wolves live in it!"

He started toward the door with Esmond and his daughter and Krah's eyes turned now to Conway. He asked softly, "And you, man who is called Rand?"

Conway shrugged, as though the whole thing were a matter of no importance to him. "Why should I want to stay?" His hands were shaking so that he thrust them into his pockets to conceal it and little trickles of sweat ran down his back. He nodded toward the window opening.

"There's a white wind blowing, Krah," he said. He drew himself erect, and his voice rose and rang. "It will catch us on the open plain. The woman will surely die and perhaps the rest of us also. Nevertheless we will go. But let it be told through the city that Krah has laid aside his manhood and put on a woman's kirtle, for he has slain by stealth and not by an honest spear!"

There was silence. Esmond stopped and turned in the doorway, the girl held close in the circle of his arm. Rohan stopped also, and their faces showed the shock of this new thought.

Conway's heart beat like a trip-hammer. He was bluffing—with all the resources of the sledge, he thought, their chances of perishing were fairly small, but there was just that germ of truth to pitch it on. He was in agony while he waited to see if the bluff had worked. Once outside the city walls he knew that the Lake was lost to him as it had been to his father.

After what seemed a very long time, Krah sighed and said quietly, "The white wind. Yes, I had forgotten that the Earth stock is so weak."

A subtle change had come over the old man. It was almost as though he too had been waiting tensely for some answer and now it had come. A deep, cold light crept into his eyes and burned there, something almost joyous.

"You may stay," he said, "until the wind drops."

Then he turned sharply and went away down the stair and his sons went with him.

Esmond stared after them and Conway was amused to see the wolfish fury in his round, mild face.

"He would have sent us out to die," said Esmond, as though he wished he could kill Krah on the spot. Danger to Marcia had transformed him from a scientist into a rather primitive man. He turned to Conway.

"Thanks. You were right when you threatened them on the wall. And if anything happens to us I hope Frazer will make them pay for it!"

"Nothing's going to happen," said Conway. "Take Marcia back to the sleeping rooms—it's warmer there and she can lie down." He looked at Ciel and said sharply, "Can you understand me?"

She nodded, rather sullenly.

Conway pointed to Marcia. "Go with her. Bring water, something to put on that cut."

Ciel rose obediently but her eyes watched him slyly as she followed the Earth-folk out and down the hall.

Conway was left quite alone.

HE forced himself to stand still for a moment and think. He forced his heart to stop pounding and his hands to stop shaking. He could not force either his elation or his fear to leave him.

His way was clear now, at least for the moment. Why was it clear? Why had Krah gone away and taken his sons with him?

The wind swooped and screamed, lifting the curtains of hide, scattering snow on the floor. The white wind, Conway smiled. He had this chance. He would never have another.

He turned and went swiftly into the second corridor that opened opposite the one where the others had gone. It too contained four small sleeping rooms. One, however, was twice as large as the others and Conway was sure it belonged to Krah.

He slipped into it, closing the curtain carefully behind him.

All that he needed was there. All that he needed to make possible this one attempt that he could ever make upon the hidden valley of his dream.

He began to strip. The coverall, the thin jersey he wore underneath, the

boots—everything that was of Earth. He must go through the city and he could not go as an Earthman. He had realized that there was only one way. He was glad of the white wind, for that would make his deception easier.

It would be cold and dangerous. But he was contemptuous of cold and beyond caring about danger. He was not going to eat his heart out and die, as his father had, because his one chance was lost forever.

In a few minutes Rand Conway was gone and in the stone chamber stood a nameless warrior of Iskar, a tall fair man wrapped in white furs, shod in rough hide boots and carrying a spear.

He retained two things, hidden carefully beneath his girdle—the little gun and a small vial, sheathed and stoppered with lead.

He turned, and Ciel was standing there, staring at him with wide astonished eyes.

She had slipped in so quietly that he had not heard her. And he knew that with one loud cry she could destroy all his plan.

In two swift angry strides he had caught her and put one hand hard over her mouth.

"Why did you come here?" he snarled. "What do you want?"

Her eyes looked up at him, steady and fierce as his own. He said, "Don't cry out or I'll kill you." She shook her head and he took his hand away a little, not trusting her.

In slow painful English she said, "Take me with you."

"Where?"

"To Earth!"

It was Conway's turn to be astonished.

"But why?"

She said vehemently, "Earth-woman proud like man. Free."

So that was the smouldering anger she had in her. She was not patient like the other women of Iskar, for she had had a glimpse of something else. He remembered what Krah's son had said.

"Did Conna teach this?"

She nodded. "You take me?" she demanded. "You take me? I run away from Krah. Hide. You take me?"

Conway smiled. He liked her. They were the same kind, he and she—nursing a hopeless dream and risking everything to make it come true.

"Why not?" he said. "Sure, I'll take you."

Her joy was a savage thing. "If you lie," she whispered, "I kill you!" Then she kissed him.

He could tell it was the first time she had ever kissed a man. He could also tell that it was not going to be the last.

He thrust her away. "You must help me then. Take these." He handed her the bundle of his discarded clothing. "Hide them. Is there a back way from the house?"

"Yes."

"Show it to me. Then wait for me—and talk to no one. No one. Understand?"

"Where you go?" she asked him. The look of wonder came back into her eyes, and something of fear. "What you do, man of Iskar?"

He shook his head. "If you don't help me, if I die—you'll never see Earth."

"Come," she said, and turned.

Esmond and Rohan were still with Marcia, still full of their fears and angers—too full to worry about Conway, the outsider. The house of Krah was empty and silent except for the wind that swept through the embrasures with a shriek of laughter, like the laughter of wolves before the kill. Conway shivered, an animal twitching of the skin.

Ciel led him down a little stair and showed him a narrow passage built for the taking of offal from the slaughtering pen—woman's work, unfit for warriors.

"I wait," she said. Her fingers closed hard on the muscles of his arm. "Come back. Come soon!"

Her fear was not for him but for herself, lest now in this last hour her hope of freedom should be snatched away. Conway knew how she felt.

He bent and gave her a quick rough kiss. "I'll come back." Then he lifted the curtain of hide and slipped out into the darkness.

CHAPTER VI

Echoes of a Dream

THE city was alive and vocal with the storm. The narrow streets shouted with it, the icy turrets of the houses quivered and rang. No snow was

falling but the thick brown whiteness drove and leaped and whirled, carried across half of Iskar in the rush of the wind. Above the tumult the stars burned clear and steady in the sky.

The cold bit deep into Conway's flesh, iron bars reaching for his heart. He drew the warm furs closer. His heartbeats quickened. His blood raced, fighting back the cold, and a strange exaltation came over him, something born out of the wild challenge of the wind. His pupils dilated, black and feral as a cat's. He began to walk, moving at a swift pace, setting his feet down surely on the glare ice and the frozen stones.

He knew the direction he must take. He had determined that the first time he saw the city and it was burned into his memory for all time.

The way to the Lake, the Lake of the Gone Forever.

There were not many in the streets and those he passed gave him no second look. The white wind laid a blurring veil over everything and there was nothing about Conway to draw attention, a lean proud-faced man bent against the wind, a solitary warrior on an errand of his own.

Several times he tried to see if he were being followed. He could not forget Krah's face with its look of secret joy, nor cease to wonder uneasily why the old man had so suddenly left the Earthfolk unwatched. But he could see nothing in that howling smother.

He made sure of the little gun and smiled.

He found his way by instinct through the twisting streets, heading always in the same direction. The houses began to thin out. Quite suddenly they were gone and Conway stood in the open valley beyond. High above he could distinguish the shining peaks of the mountains lifting against the stars.

The full sweep of the wind met him here. He faced it squarely, laughing, and went on over the tumbled rocks. The touch of madness that had been in him ever since he reached Iskar grew into an overwhelming thing.

Part of his identity slipped away. The wind and the snow and the bitter rocks were part of him. He knew them and they knew him. They could not harm him. Only the high peaks looked down on him with threatening faces and it seemed to him that they were angry.

He was beginning to hear the echoes of his dream but they were still faint. He was not yet afraid. He was, in some strange way, happy. He had never been more alone and yet he did not feel lonely. Something wild and rough woke within him to meet the wild roughness of the storm and he felt a heady pride, a certainty that he could stand against any man of Iskar on his own ground.

The city was lost behind him. The valley had him between its white walls, vague and formless now, closing in upon him imperceptibly beyond the curtain of the storm. There was a curious timelessness about his journey, almost a spacelessness, as though he existed in a dimension of his own.

AND in that private world of his it did not seem strange nor unfitting that Ciel's voice should cry out thinly against the wind, that he should turn to see her clambering after him, nimble-footed, reckless with haste.

She reached him, spent with running. "Krah," she gasped, "He go ahead with four. One follow. I see. I follow too." She made a quick, sharp gesture that took in the whole valley. "Trap. They catch. They kill. Go back."

Conway did not stir. She shook him, in a passion of urgency. "Go back! Go back now!"

He stood immovable, his head raised, his eyes questing into the storm, seeking the enemies he only half believed were there. And then, deep and strong across the wind, came the baying of a hunter's horn. It was answered from the other side of the valley. Another spoke, and another, and Conway counted them. Six—Krah and his five sons around and behind him, so that the way back to the city was closed.

Conway began to see the measure of the old man's cunning and he smiled, an animal baring of the teeth.

"You go," he said to Ciel. "They will not harm you."

"What I do they punish," she answered grimly. "No. You must live. They hunt you but I know trails, ways. Go many times to Lake of the Gone Forever. They not kill there. Come."

She turned but he caught her and would not let her go, full of a quick suspicion.

"Why do you care so much about me?" he demanded. "Esmond or Rohan

could take you to Earth as well."

"Against Krah's will?" She laughed. "They are soft men, not like you." Her eyes met his fairly in the gloom, the black pupils wide and lustrous, looking deep into him so that he was strangely stirred. "But there is more," she said. "I never love before. Now I do. And—you are Conna's son."

Conway said, very slowly, "How did you know that?"

"Krah know. I hear him talk."

Then it had been a trap all along, from the beginning. Krah had known. The old man had given him one chance to go from Iskar and he had not taken it—and Krah had been glad. After that he had withdrawn and waited for Conway to come to him.

The girl said, "But I know without hearing. Now come, son of Conna."

She led off, swift as a deer, her skirts kilted above her knees. Conway followed and behind and around them the horns bayed and answered with the eager voices of hounds that have found the scent and will never let it go.

All down the long valley the hunters drove them and the mountain walls narrowed in and in, and the ringing call of the horns came closer. There was a sound of joy in them, and they were without haste. Never once, beyond the white spume of the blowing snow, did Conway catch a glimpse of his pursuers. But he knew without seeing that old Krah's face bore a bleak and bitter smile, the terrible smile of a vengeance long delayed.

Conway knew well where the hunt would end. The horns would cry him into the throat of the cleft, and then they would be silent. He would not be permitted to reach the Lake.

Again he touched the little gun and his face could not have been less savage than Krah's. He was not afraid of spears.

The girl led him swiftly, surely, among the tangled rocks and the spurs of ice, her skirt whipping like a grey flag in the wind. High overhead the cold peaks filled the sky, leaving only a thin rift of stars. And suddenly, as though they were living things, the walls of the valley rushed together upon him, and the shouting of the horns rose to an exultant clamor in his ears, racing, leaping toward him.

He flung up his head and yelled, an

angry, defiant cry. Then there was silence, and through the driven veils of snow he saw the shapes of men and the dim glittering of spears.

He would have drawn the gun and loosed its bright spray of instant sleep into the warriors. The drug would keep them quiet long enough for him to do what he had to do. But Ciel gave him no time. She wrenched at him suddenly, pulling him almost bodily into a crack between the rocks.

"Hurry!" she panted. "Hurry!"

The rough rock scraped him as he jammed his way through. He could hear voices behind him, loud and angry. It was pitch dark, even to his eyes, but Ciel caught his furs and pulled him along—a twist, a turn, a sharp corner that almost trapped him where her smallness slipped past easily. Then they were free again and he was running beside her, following her urgent breathless voice.

For a few paces he ran and then his steps slowed and dragged at last to a halt. There was no wind here in this sheltered place. There were no clouds of blowing snow to blur his vision.

He stood in a narrow cleft between the mountains. On both sides the cliffs of ice rose up, sheer and high and infinitely beautiful out of the powdery drifts. The darkling air was full of whirling motes of frost, like the dust of diamonds, and overhead the shining pinnacles stood clear against a sky of deepest indigo, spangled with great stars.

He stood in the narrow valley of his dream. And now at last he was afraid.

Truth and nightmare had come together like the indrawn flanks of the mountains and he was caught between them. Awake, aware of the biting cold and the personal sensation of his flesh, still the nameless terror of the dream beset him.

He could almost see the remembered shadow of his father weeping by the sheathed rocks that hid the end of the cleft, almost hear that cry of loss—I can never go back to the Lake of the Gone Forever!

He knew that now he was going to see the end of the dream. He would not wake this time before he passed the barrier rocks. The agonizing fear that had no basis in his own life stood naked in his heart and would not go.

He had known, somehow, all his life

that this time must come. Now that it was here he found that he could not face it. The formless baseless terror took his strength away and not all his reasoning could help him. He could not go on.

And yet he went, as always, slowly forward through the drifting snow.

He had forgotten Ciel. He was surprised when he caught at him, urging him to run. He had forgotten Krah.

He remembered only the despairing words whispered back and forth by the cold lips of the ice. *Gone Forever . . . Gone Forever . . .* ! He looked up and the golden stars wheeled above him in the dark blue sky. The beauty of them was evil and the shimmering turrets of the ice were full of lurking laughter.

Nightmare—and he walked in it broad awake.

It was not far. The girl dragged him on, drove him, and he obeyed automatically, quickening his slow pace. He did not fight. He knew that it was no use. He went on as a man walks patiently to the gallows.

He passed the barrier rocks. He was not conscious now of movement. In a sort of stasis, cold as the ice, he entered the cave that opened beyond them and looked at last upon the Lake of the Gone Forever.

CHAPTER VII

Black Lake

IT was black, that Lake. Utterly black and very still, lying in its ragged cradle of rock under the arching roof where, finally, the mountains met.

A strange quality of blackness, Conway thought, and shuddered deeply with the hand of nightmare still upon him. He stared into it, and suddenly, as though he had always known, he realized that the lake was like the pupil of a living eye, having no light of its own but receiving into itself all light, all impression.

He saw himself reflected in that great unstirring eye and Ciel beside him. Where the images fell there were faint lines of frosty radiance, as though the substance of the Lake were gravating upon itself in glowing acid the memory of what it saw.

Soft-footed from behind him came six other shadows—Krah and his five sons—and Conway could see that a great anger was upon them. But they had left their spears outside.

"We may not kill in this place," said Krah slowly, "but we can keep you from the thing you would do."

"How do you know what I mean to do?" asked Conway and his face was strange as though he listened to distant voices speaking in an unknown tongue.

Krah answered, "As your father came before you, so you have come—to steal from us the secret of the Lake."

"Yes," said Conway absently. "Yes, that is so."

The old man and his tall sons closed in around Conway and Ciel came and stood between them.

"Wait!" she said.

For the first time they acknowledged the presence of the girl.

"For your part in this," said Krah grimly, "you will answer later."

"No!" she cried defiantly. "I answer now! Listen. Once you love Conna. You learn from him good things. His mate happy, not slave. He bring wisdom to Iskar—but now you hate Conna, you forget."

"I go to Earth with Conna's son. But first he must come here. It is right he come. But you kill, you full of hate for Rand—so I come to save him."

She stood up to Krah, the little grey mouse transfigured into a bright creature of anger, blazing with it, alive with it.

"All my life—hate! Because of Rand you try to kill memory of Conna, you teach people hate and fear. But my mother learn from Conna. I learn from her—and I no forget! Rand happy, free. My mother know—and I no forget."

It came to Conway with a queer shock that she was not speaking of him but of another Rand. He listened to the girl and there was a stillness in him as deep and lightless as the stillness of the Lake.

"You not kill, old man," Ciel whispered, "Not yet. Let him see, let him know. Then kill if he is evil."

She swung around.

"Son of Conna! Look into the Lake. All the dead of Iskar buried here. They gone forever but memory lives. All come here in life, so that the Lake remember. Look, son of Conna, and think of your father!"

Still with that strange quiet heavy on his heart Rand Conway looked into the Lake and did as Ciel told him to do. Krah and his sons looked also and did not move.

At first there was nothing but the black infinite depth of the Lake. *It is semi-liquid*, said his father's notes, the notes he had kept secret from everyone—and in this heavy medium are suspended particles of some transuranic element—perhaps an isotope of uranium itself that is unknown to us. Incalculable wealth—incalculable pain! *My soul is there, lost in the Lake of the Gone Forever.*

Rand Conway stood waiting and the thought of his father was very strong in him. His father, who had died mourning that he could never come back.

Slowly, slowly, the image of his father took shape in the substance of the lake, a ghostly picture painted with a brush of cold fire against the utter dark.

It was no projection of Rand Conway's own memory mirrored there, for this was not the man he had known, old before his time and broken with longing. This man was young, and his face was happy.

He turned and beckoned to someone behind him, and the shadowy figure of a girl came into the circle of his outstretched arm. They stood together, and a harsh sob broke from old Krah's throat. Conway knew that his father and the pale-haired lovely girl had stood where he stood now on the brink of the Lake and looked down as he was looking, that their images might be forever graven into the heart of the strange darkness below.

They kissed. And Ciel whispered, "See her face, how it shines with joy."

The figures moved away and were gone. Conway watched, beyond emotion, beyond fear. Some odd portion of his brain even found time to theorize on the electrical impulses of thought and how they could shape the free energy in the unknown substance of the Lake, so that it became almost a second subconscious mind for everyone on Iskar, storehouse from which the memories of a race could be called at will.

The eye of the Lake had seen and now, at the urging of those intense minds, it produced the pictures it had recorded like the relentless unreeling of some cosmic film.

RAND CONWAY watched, step by step, the disintegration of a man's soul. And it was easy for him to understand, since his own life had been ruled by that same consuming greed.

Conna came again and again to the Lake, alone. It seemed to hold a terrible fascination for him. After all he was a prospector, with no goal before him for many years but the making of a big strike. Finally he brought instruments and made tests and after that the fascination turned to greed and the greed in time to a sort of madness.

It was a madness that Conna fought against and he had reason. The girl came again. With her this time were Krah and his sons, all younger and less bitter than now, and others whom Conway did not know. It was obviously a ritual visit and it had to do with the new-born child the girl held in her arms.

Rand Conway's heart tightened until it was hardly beating. And through the frozen numbness that held him the old fear began to creep back, the nightmare fear of the dream, where something was hidden from him that he could not endure to see.

Conna, the girl, and a new-born child. *I cannot escape. I cannot wake from this.*

Conna's inward struggle went on. He must have suffered the tortures of hell, for it was plain that what he meant to do would cut him off from all he loved. But he was no longer quite sane. The Lake mocked him, taunted him with its unbelievable wealth, and he could not forget it.

The last time that Conna came to the Lake of the Gone Forever, he had laid aside the furs and the spear of Iskar, and put on again his spaceman's leather and the holstered gun. He brought with him a leaden container, to take back proof of the Lake and what it held.

But while he worked to take his sample—the sample that would, in the end, mean the destruction of the Lake and all it meant to Iskar—the pale-haired girl came, her eyes full of pain and pleading, and the child was with her, a well-grown boy now, nearly two years old.

And Conna's son cried out suddenly and swayed so that Ciel put out her hand to him, and he clung to it, with the universe dark and reeling about him.

I know now! I know the fear behind the dream!

Within the Lake the shadowy child watched with uncomprehending horror how his mother snatched the little heavy box from his father's hands—his father who had grown so strange and violent and was dressed so queerly in black.

He watched how his mother wept and cried out to his father, pleading with him, begging him to stop and think and not destroy them all.

But Conna would not stop. He had fought his fight and lost and he would not stop.

He tried to take the box again. There was a brief moment when he and the girl swayed together on the brink of the Lake. And then—quickly, so very quickly that she had only time for one look at Conna as she fell—the girl fell over the edge. The disturbed cold fires of the Lake boiled up and overwhelmed her and there was no sight of her ever again.

The child screamed and ran to the edge of the rock. He too would have fallen if his father had not held him back.

For a long while Conna stood there, holding the whimpering child in his arms. The girl had taken the leaden box with her but Conna had forgotten that. He had forgotten everything except that his mate was dead, that he had killed her. And it was as though Conna too had died.

Then he turned and fled, taking the boy with him.

THE surface of the Lake was as it had been, dark and still.

Rand Conway went slowly to his knees. He felt dully as though he had been ill for a long time. All the strength was gone out of him. He stayed there on the icy rock, motionless and silent, beyond feeling, beyond thought. He was only dimly aware that Ciel knelt beside him, that he was still clinging to her hand.

Presently he looked up at Krah.

"That was why you gave me my chance to leave Iskar. I was Conna's son—but I was the son of your daughter, too."

"For her sake," said Krah slowly, "I would have let you go."

Conway nodded. He was very tired. So many things were clear to him now.

Everything had changed, even the meaning of the name he bore. Rand. It was all very strange, very strange indeed.

Ciel's hand was warm and comforting in his.

Slowly he took from his girdle the little gun and the leaden vial, and let them drop and slide away.

"Father of my mother," he said to Krah, "let me live." He bowed his head and waited.

But Krah did not answer. He only said, "Does Conna live?"

"No. He paid for her life, Krah, with his own."

"That is well," whispered the old man. And his sons echoed, "That is well."

Conway stood up. His mood of weary submission had left him.

"Krah," he said. "I had no part in Conna's crime and for my own—you know. I am of your blood, old man. I will not beg again. Take your spears and give me mine and we will see who dies!"

A ghost of a grim smile touched Krah's lips. He looked deeply into his grandson's eyes and presently he nodded.

"You are of my blood. And I think you will not forget. There will be no taking of spears."

He stepped back and Conway said. "Let the others go. They know nothing of the Lake and will not know. I will stay on Iskar."

He caught Ciel to him. "One thing. Krah, Ciel must not be punished."

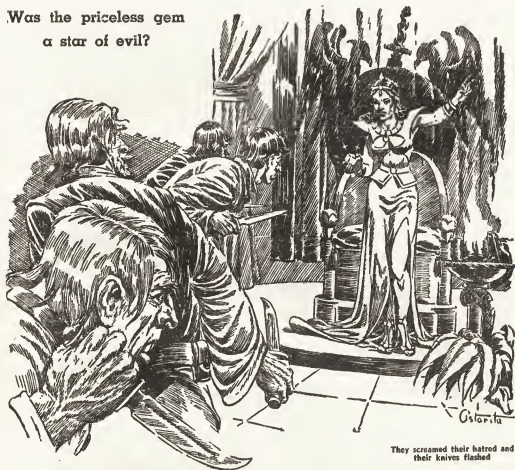
Again the grim smile. Some of the frosty cold had gone from Krah's eyes. In time, Conway thought, the old bitterness might vanish altogether.

"You have stood together by the Lake," said Krah. "It is our record of marriage. So if Ciel is beaten that is up to you."

He turned abruptly and left the cavern and his sons went with him. Slowly, having yet no words to say, Rand Conway and Ciel followed them—into the narrow valley that held no further terrors for the man who had at last found his own world.

Behind them, the Lake of the Gone Forever lay still and black, as though it pondered over its memories, the loves and hatreds and sorrows of a world gathered from the beginning of time, safe there now until the end of it.

Was the priceless gem
a star of evil?



They screamed their hatred and
their knives flashed

The Queen's Astrologer

WHEN the stranger tapped furtively on the door of the Queen's Astrologer, in Ynarth, it was allmost night. There was snow on the gabled roofs of all the huddled houses, and snow in the streets—all trodden and fouled by the footsteps of men—and there was a cap of snow resting rakishly on the head of Robin Ghaur, high up on a pole in the central square.

The Queen had had Robin Ghaur executed some time since, very edifyingly and linger-

ingly, and had had his head—by special order neither flayed nor roasted nor crushed slowly between the jaws of a monstrous vise—had had his head put up on display to remind her subjects that rebellion was unhealthy. She had taken other measures too, which most of her subjects tried not to think about, but sometimes dreamed of. In consequence, the town and the kingdom of Ynarth was quite desperately loyal to the Queen in her palace which frowned down from the heights above them.

By MURRAY LEINSTER

The stranger had come into the town just before the gates were closed at sunset, limping with a stick like a half-starved beggar. He'd gone hobbling about the streets until he found an inn which was properly poverty-stricken, and there he produced copper coins and bought food—which he wolfed—and sat seeming to doze while he listened to the talk. But the talk was not informative because the Queen had many spies. In the end the stranger—speaking with a slight foreign accent—had to ask the way to the house of the Queen's Astrologer.

Now he tapped furtively on the door. There was a properly impressive wait. Then a wide, vacuous face grinned through a grilled opening, and the stranger put a coin between the bars. It fell to the floor, and it rang like gold. So instantly the door was opened, and the Astrologer's servant grinned and slobbered, beckoning the stranger in. Then he closed and barred the door again and without a word led the way upstairs.

THE stranger paused when light struck his eyes. He was in a great room with a huge fireplace at one end. It made a comforting noise as the flames roared up the chimney. There was a stuffed alligator hanging from the ceiling and stuffed owls and dried bats about the walls, and most impressive astrological charts and instruments here and there. But the Queen's Astrologer himself, was dressed in a quite commonplace costume, and he was at work upon a curiously complicated device of glass tubing and liquids and a bellows. He looked up and frowned.

The stranger, without a word, stripped off his beggar's clothing. As the tattered garments dropped, the rich costume beneath made the Astrologer's eyes widen. He stood up and bowed gracefully.

"You have come far," he said drily. "Your costume is that of a priest of Ars, from far beyond the mountains. I am overwhelmed by the honor. We do not worship Ars in Ynarth, to be sure, but I offer what professional courtesies may be appropriate."

The stranger nodded and took a seat with easy assurance.

"I expected courtesy. I hope for aid," he said coldly.

The astrologer said as drily as before, "In everything the Queen would approve of, I am at your service. Love-philthers, horoscopes, charms, magic of the three colors; anything that is not treasonable I will be most happy to oblige a confreere." As the stranger

looked at him quizzically, the astrologer explained:

"Our Queen is wise beyond comparison. She has spies, and spies upon spies, and spies upon spies upon spies. I assure you that no sane man in Ynarth would even think a treasonable thought. And I am a sane man."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "I had no thought of treason," he observed. "It is a matter of religion. You have heard of the great image of the god Ars, in Sclit. It is fifteen spans high, of resonant golden plates and clad in armor made of the bones of the enemies of our nation. Doubtless you have heard of its great, glowing, single eye, as red as fury, bright as hate and with the fires of hell within its depths. The news may not have reached so far, but some sacrilegious thief has been so skilful and so bold as to steal it."

"I am properly shocked," said the Queen's Astrologer politely.

"I hope," said the stranger, "for your aid in recovering it."

"Now, unfortunately," said the astrologer drily, "my magic is not particularly strong in that branch. Lost cows, errant wives, faithless sweethearts and the like—I have had some success in finding such things. But idols' eyes—no. I am afraid I am a bit rusty in the magical processes potent in finding lost idols' eyes."

"A fig for magic," said the stranger contemptuously. "Pish for astrology! Tosh for charms and incantations! I recognize the device on which you are laboring. It deals with a matter of which I have some knowledge."

The astrologer started a little. He glanced at the apparatus, and looked back to his visitor.

"Yes?" But he looked incredulous. "Indeed, I have had some difficulties—"

The stranger said tolerantly, "Children hear the cries of bats, which no adult can hear. You wondered, and sought to know the reason. You made a whistle, which as you made it ever more shrill reached a point where to your ears it was no sound at all, yet children insisted that they still could hear it. Eh? You work at a device to make a sound no ears can hear?"

The astrologer took a deep breath.

"Well, now!" he said. "I did not expect to find a fellow-scientist in a priest of Ars! To be sure! Dogs also hear these sounds our ears cannot catch. The Queen—"

HE STOPPED then. The stranger smiled, not too pleasantly.

"In Schliit," he said, "there are the holy dogs of the goddess Tici, who hates all evil-doers and reveals all crime. When persons accused of crime deny it, they are led before the dogs, intermingled with other persons plainly innocent. The holy dogs display their anger when the guilty ones approach. They—ah—they have been trained to growl when they hear the sound that to human ears is no sound at all."

The Queen's Astrologer said wryly:

"I have thought that had I a conscience, it would hurt me sometimes in the service of my Queen. But I see that you priests of Ars and Tici are of my kidney. Except—" here his tone was polite—"much more advanced."

"Truly," said the stranger with some boastfulness. "We know of many sounds which cannot be heard by men. Some are too shrill and some are too deep. There is a sound which rouses fear, though the hearer hears it not. There is a sound which rouses amorous passion. Our love-charms do not fail in the temple of Nus the love-goddess!"

The Queen's Astrologer made a gesture of courteous interruption. He called his empty-faced servant and informed him that the stranger would dine and lodge there. He commanded the best possible meal for the two of them, to be fetched from the very best inn of the town. The half-wit, stumbling, went slouching down the stairs.

"You will be ill-served," said the astrologer apologetically, "but if I had a servant with all his wits, my clients—other than the Queen—would think him a spy for the Queen and would fear to ask my services. As it is, besides my official position I have a good business in curses, love-potions and the like aids to intended adultery. Since such things usually work out anyhow, and since I always faithfully report everybody who asks to have a pox put on the Queen—they invariably turn out to have been her spies—I live quite quietly and in good favor with Her Majesty."

He busied himself drawing out a table and cutlery and pouring a huge flagon of wine for his guest.

"But about the eye of Ars—" Then he paused and said inquiringly, "Should I make some respectful gesture when mentioning his name?"

The stranger grinned. The astrologer went on drily:

"Your pardon. I thought that you might

believe in your own god. But I fear that I have no knowledge of the jewel at all. It is of infinite value, I am sure. But no thief would dare to offer it for sale in Ynarth. The Queen's spies would seize him, Her Majesty would condemn him to death for his crime, and the jewel—"

"She would keep. To be sure. Yet it is in Ynarth," said the stranger confidently. "Of that I am sure. Was there not some disturbance here not too long since?"

The astrologer shrugged.

"Robin Ghaur led an insurrection," he said in a careful toneless voice. "Her Majesty was pleased to summon him for a private conversation, and he had the bad taste to observe that Her Majesty's lovers have short lives, and then he fled the country. Her Majesty was justly incensed."

The priest of Ars drank of the wine from the flagon.

"And?"

"His wife and two sons vanished," said the astrologer. "Her Majesty expressed indignation, saying that they also had fled the realm. She vowed that she would hang any man who dared to say she'd had them slain to spite Robin, moreover, so no man dared to say it. But Robin appeared on the border to avenge them, and indeed he raised a pretty force and defeated the Queen's army in two pitched battles."

"And?" said the stranger again.

"Two of the Queen's spies got to him," said the astrologer. "Daring men, those spies. They kidnapped him from the very midst of his rebels, and the rebellion fell to pieces. Robin could rouse the Queen's enemies to rage. All others but roused their fears."

The stranger nodded and grinned.

"The Queen took a great vengeance," the astrologer added, very carefully without intonation. "All the people of Ynarth were required to observe the rebels, imbedded to their necks in the masonry of a new structure the Queen was building. Some, seeing their sons there, were so indiscreet as to go mad. But indeed the rebels made a very dolorous sound, crying out as they did. It took some of them near a week to die."

THE stranger in his rich garments nodded with an air of complete satisfaction.

"Of course," added the astrologer, "Robin Ghaur himself was treated with special severity. He lived nearly ten days. His head is in the public square now."

"He," said the stranger comfortably, "he had the eye of the idol of Ars. I was sure of that. I seek your aid in finding it."

There was a noise below. The half-witted servant climbed the stairs with a great clatter. He carried a huge basket from which savory odors issued. He put it on the table the astrologer had pulled out and loutishly set plates, and exposed to view a steaming goose and a meat pie, a snowy-white bread and all the proper adjuncts for a meal.

He made a gobbling noise and retired to the chimney-corner, where he made faces at the flames. The astrologer set chairs and bowed to his guest. The stranger rose and took his place. The astrologer carved. He seemed uneasily thoughtful.

"If you would tell me—"

The stranger-priest of Ars grunted with his mouth full.

"There are sounds we cannot hear," he said complacently, after an instant, "yet they affect our hearts. I spoke of the sounds which cause fear.

"In Sclit those sounds are made in the temple of the god Plut, who rules the after-world. They are very effective in promoting piety. In the temple of Nus, the love-goddess, such unhearable strains rouse her devotees to frenzy of another sort, and their amorous transports are doubtless pleasing to the goddess." His tone was purest irony. "And I spoke of the holy dogs of Tici, goddess of justice. I am myself a priest of Ars, the god of war."

The astrologer nodded.

"The image of Ars is made of resonant golden plates," the stranger repeated. He drank. "It quivers to sound like a thin goblet to the chorus of a drinking-song. And—can a bell sound with any but its own voice?"

The astrologer, chewing thoughtfully, shook his head.

"Of course not," said the stranger. "Stand beneath a great bell and shout at it, and it will reply with a tiny clanging of its own voice. The eye of the image of Ars is a crystal, cunningly carved by masters of old time. It rings, as a bell. But no man can hear its voice. Nonetheless, it is a sound. It is a sound which rouses hate."

The astrologer ceased to chew. He stared. The priest of Ars grinned.

"It would be instructive," he said tolerantly, "to one who but fumbles with the science of unhearable sounds, to see a ceremony to the glory of Ars. The temple's head addresses the worshippers, recounting the evil deeds of a national enemy. The

ringing crystal eye resounds to his voice. But it resounds in the tones that men cannot hear, yet respond to.

"They rouse a mighty rage. The populace shouts. The sound causes the crystal to reverberate yet again and so increase their fury. Drums beat. Men howl and scream with the hatred the crystal eye of Ars increases with every burst of sound. When the worshippers are dismissed, they are as madmen. They have been filled with carefully directed hatred."

The Queen's astrologer swallowed, and was still. The stranger chuckled.

"Of course," he said amiably, "they would feel rage in any case. The unheard sounds produce it. But they are hearing of the villainy of a national enemy when their rage is roused. Did we choose, we the priests of Ars could rouse them similarly against our king, or against even the priests of another god. So the priests of Ars are most powerful of all in Sclit."

The Queen's astrologer made a helpless gesture.

"But Robin Ghaur," he said uneasily. "He surely—was it not the honest rage of honest men which filled his followers?"

The stranger laughed. It was a very cynical laugh.

"Robin Ghaur," he said zestfully, "was the son of a temple dancer whom Robin Ghaur's father stole away. He was a great noble and he rode fast and far, and guarded himself after. It was fifteen full years before the vigilance of his guards relaxed and we were able to kill man and woman together by an assassin's dagger.

"**D**OUBTLESS this Robin Ghaur knew some of our temple secrets through his mother, before we killed her. He stole the eye of Ars to rouse men's hatred against his Queen. But—" here the grin of the stranger-priest was pure malevolence—"when the Queen's spies neared him, waves of hatred spread out about him. But the Queen's spies hated him! He was in their thoughts when fury rose, not the Queen! So once they had him fast, no pleading nor any possible bribe would move them, who hated him as the mobs in the temple of Ars hate those we priests command them to."

The astrologer was very pale, now.

"Indeed," he said, unsmiling, "I had thought myself without illusions. But I find that I believed in Robin Ghaur. I believed in the despairing fury of those who followed

him and won impossible battles. I thought it enviable to have the courage to rebel, even without hope. But it does not seem enviable to have rebelled because of unrealized devices created to make men mad. It is not glorious, though futile, to have won victories because of the calculating science of the priests of Ars. I am disillusioned. I was a fool."

The stranger-priest of Ars was amused. He said benignly, "And you a scientist! I shall aid you with your device to make sounds that none can hear. Ha! I will adjust your device to the sound made in the temple of Nus. And when a buxom wench comes seeking a love-charm for some hulking peasant lout she would have adore her, you shall fill her ears with a sound she will not know of. She will only know that such frenzied love possesses her that you being nearest are her instant fierce desire! Any maid or matron you may fancy—"

The Queen's Astrologer shook his head. "Now that," he said unsteadily, "is something for the Queen to know of. She has a fancy— But no. I am a fool. I have been a scoundrel indeed, but I took some heart from the belief that there were better men than I. And you destroy that belief." He swallowed. "You are wiser than I, sir priest of Ars. You are my guest. But you distress me. I know nothing of this jewel that you seek. I cannot help you."

The stranger said amiably, "Come, now! A great jewel, red as fury, bright as hate, with all the fires of hell in its heart? Such a treasure would not be lost! What spies captured Robin, and where would they dare to flee, to sell so great a gem? But find them, and I will ransom it for more gold than any broker would pay. I owe no vengeance for its theft. Not now! Robin Ghaur paid his score. Ten days in dying, you tell me!"

The Queen's Astrologer shivered a little.

"I think I pay a little, also. You do not know what comfort it is to believe that other men are better than you are. It is a warming thought to think that since wiser, greater men believe in kindly gods—gods you cannot reach—that those gods must somehow exist and may even tolerate the men too blind to see them. This you have taken from me."

The stranger-priest shrugged.

"I offer you much gold."

"Which of course should pay for anything." The Queen's Astrologer closed his eyes. "Let me think, now! Robin Ghaur's body they threw on a dung-hill—what was left of it—by the Queen's express command. None would dare remove or bury it. The

two spies who kidnapped him came to blows in the Queen's own presence as they disputed which had done most to seize him. She had them hanged for insolence. There has been a murder—yes—I think two—and a beating—"

He thought, his face drawn. After a matter of moments he stood up. He scribbled on a parchment. He beckoned to his servant. They went out of the room together. The Queen's Astrologer came back alone. The stranger said coldly:

"If you have sent news of me to the Queen, and I am seized, I shall swear that you bade me come and recover the eye of Ars, which somehow you had laid hands on."

The Queen's Astrologer grimaced.

"If I had sent news to the Queen, I would have told her you tempted me to treason. But I did not." Then he said humbly, "What I have done is to send my servant to the place where I suspect the eye of Ars may be found. I did not suspect until you told me of its powers. And I sent him because a man with all his wits would not willingly go nor willingly gain that jewel. We shall have to wait his return. And if you would care to instruct me in the science of sounds which men do not hear—"

THE priest of Ars smiled contemptuously. But he drained his goblet of wine and began to speak, precisely. Presently he rose, and expounding as he worked, condescendingly modified the apparatus the Queen's Astrologer had made.

"Ah, yes!" said the astrologer, over and over again as the stranger from beyond the mountains made a point. "Most remarkable! Most ingenious! Truly admirable!"

And in the face of such appreciation, the priest of Ars grew boastful indeed. It is one thing to pose as the mouthpiece of an imaginary deity. It is quite another to receive the tribute of admiration from a man who is able to understand without hope of equaling your monstrous cleverness. The priest of Ars showed off with enormous satisfaction.

And time went on and time went on. The stranger-priest grew a little drunk, what with wine and the astrologer's reverent attention. It grew past the time when guards could have come to seize him had the Queen's Astrologer betrayed him. Presently he observed, somewhat tipsily, that if the astrologer's servant were back, he would prove the effect of certain sounds.

"He will come," said the astrologer. "It may be that he had to hide from a patrol of

the Queen's soldiers. They ride abroad at night, seizing all who roam by darkness, on suspicion that they plot against the Queen. But he is a known half-wit, and I am secure in the Queen's good favor. There is no need to fear."

The stranger-priest of Ars drank again. Later, lolling in his chair, he went incontinently to sleep in the midst of slurred boastings of the uses he had made of sounds which none could hear. Then the Queen's Astrologer paced up and down, frowning miserably.

The stranger had been snoring half an hour when a feeble scratching came below. The astrologer hastened to open the door. It was the half-witted servant, his eyes wide with pure animal terror. His breath came in gasps. He shivered. He whimpered a little as the astrologer closed and barred the great outer door. With shaking fingers he thrust something very hard and small into his master's hand. Then he seemed to wish to collapse. But the astrologer led him up the stairs, and put him before the fire, and poured a great mug of wine for him.

"So you found it, certainly," said the astrologer drily. His eyes ran over his servant's garments. They were stained with filth, and splashed with ice, and there were ominous splotches on them that looked like blood. "You cleansed the gem and took it to the Queen's castle as I bade you?"

The half-wit gobbled, whimpering.

"Ah!" said the astrologer. "You called at the gate, and they knew you for my servant and admitted you, and sent you even to the Queen, eh? Ah! And you gave it to the Queen herself, with my scroll?"

The half-wit gobbled again, weeping in fear.

"I think I know the rest," said the astrologer very quietly. "The Queen summoned all her guards and courtiers, and told them icily that by my magic I had recovered a jewel which one of them had stolen from Robin Ghaur and had tried to hide from her. She called them fools and wittings, eh?"

The half-wit cringed, remembering.

"**H**OW many did she order killed?" demanded the astrologer hungrily. "She raged, eh? She began by purring sweetly, as is her wont, and then as anger grew in her, her eyes flashed and her face grew contorted, and her voice grew shrill?"

The half-wit moaned in remembered fear.

"She shrieked at them, eh? She screamed

at them in rage and hatred violent even for the Queen? And they began also to rage? The great hall became a place of deadly quiet save for her voice alone, but the eyes of all the guards and all her noblemen began to glow like fire? They moved toward her, with their faces drawn into masks of hate? They went quietly, step by step, their hands clenching and unclenching as she shrieked at them in her fury?"

The half-wit groveled. He wept for the terror now past.

"It would have been good to see," said the astrologer, very quietly. "Ah, it would have been good to see! And suddenly the control of one would break, and he would leap upon her, snarling, and his fellows—male and female alike—would howl like wolves and leap to destroy her with their teeth and nails! Those gentle folk who have lived by her favor on the lifeblood of her people! It would have been good to see! They tore her into small, revolting bits of skin and flesh, did they not?"

"And then the monstrous tumult continued, and their rage turned upon each other, and they fought bloodily over the untidy morsels that had been their Queen and screamed their hatred, and knives flashed, and—"

The Queen's Astrologer's nostrils quivered. But the half-wit wept and gobbled and pawed imploringly at his feet. Then the astrologer took a deep breath.

"No, I am not angry with you," he said softly. "You did as I bade you, and waited until you could bring the gem back to me after the Queen had seen it. You have done well. Drink!"

He gave the gibbering creature more to drink. He looked at the gem in his hand. It flashed and flamed in the firelight. It was as red as fury and as bright as hate, and there seemed to be fires as of hell in its interior.

But the astrologer picked it up with a little distaste. He put it in the wooden jaws of a clumsy vise. He struck shrewdly, and the great gem split neatly into two irregular halves. He spoke quietly to the half-wit slobbering over the great mug of wine.

"A bell, once broken, has never the same voice again, no matter how skilful the repair," he said drily. "A bit of gum, now, will mend this so my guest will scarce detect it, and in any case will credit the disaster to Robin rather than to me." He cemented the two halves together again, very neatly. He wiped away the excess cement. The break

and repair did not show at all.

"And I have much knowledge of the business," he said.

He put the deadly gem upon the table where he and the stranger had dined.

"Much knowledge!" he repeated ironically. "Now I too can make sounds which none can hear but which rouse terror and rage and lust and all that is evil in men. And I have learned that all other men are scoundrels in no way better than myself." Then he laughed without mirth. "Well, now! If there be no man more honest than myself, then I have to act as if I were an honest man and do what nobler men would do did they exist! I have to try to bring a little of peace and justice and mercy to the kingdom of Ynarth, just as if I were such a one as Robin tried to be!"

THE half-wit yawned cavernously, and curled up on his side by the fireplace. He slept like a puppy, twitching a little in his sleep.

"The Queen and all her court well dead," said the astrologer in ironic meditation.

"Madness struck them and they died. I shall spread a tale that Robin laid a curse on them—on the Queen and her court, and every king and queen who may follow her, that madness shall fall on such as are tyrants. It was a curse, of sorts, when he swallowed this gem! 'Twill give a touch of reason to a reign or two, 'ere they perceive the unreasonable-ness of such sanity."

Then he glanced at the apparatus the stranger—the priest—the scientist of Sclit had so deftly modified for him. He grinned suddenly—wily. "Meanwhile I study to learn if there be any unheard sound that will make honest men of those it beats upon!"

He shrugged his shoulders. The sky was glowing faintly to the east. He looked again at the jewel. Its fracture and repair was imperceptible. Then he went to his snoring guest, to shake him awake to be ready—in the guise of a limping beggar—to slip out of the gates of the city the instant they were opened, so that he could be lost among the mountains before the people of Ynarth knew that their Queen was dead.



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by **CLEVE CARTMILL**

WE WERE deep in the Heavens, so it was possibly a natural thing for an angel to appear on our screen. But it was startling. Pat almost fell out of the pilot's chair and I grabbed a rail for support.

"Thank heaven!" the vision said. "Oh, thank heaven!"

You'd expect an angel to say that, of course, but you wouldn't expect her to have red hair, green eyes and—well, two

of everything. The way I understood it angels didn't need sex appeal. What she had was more than an appeal, it was a downright command.

I checked a low whistle as she said, "We're desperate! You *will* help us, of course?"

I began to come to. This was no angel. This was a woman. And I was glad. Seldom have these jaundiced eyes scanned such a gorgeous gal in even the beauty

spots of the inhabited planets.

Finally I said, "This is the *Dolphin*, Space Salvage, Incorporated. Jake Murchison, first mate, speaking. What's the difficulty?"

Desperation went out of her. It was replaced by—ice is all I can call it. I know eyes can't harden at will—it's physically impossible—but hers seemed to. And that lush mouth turned into a red pencil mark, slanted at one corner.

"Oh!" she said and there was contempt in it. "The pirates."

Now that's a word you don't apply to spacemen if you don't want your teeth kicked in. I guess I flushed for my face felt oven-baked. If she'd been a man I'd have felt like jumping through the screen at her.

"Fine way to get help," I growled. "Throwing names around. Forget it. I won't help you."

"You must," she said. "Interstellar law."

This was a level statement of fact with no triumph in it, no heat, no appeal. Just the truth.

"All right," I said, just as levelly. "What's the dope?"

"I am Helen Wall, captain of the *Andromeda*, bound for Arcton. We are stuck to the side of an asteroid with fifty-seven passengers, completely helpless."

I thought it over. "That seems simple enough. We'll take a fix on you, you get your people out in lifeboats and we'll take you aboard. Bring your own food. It'll be crowded. The *Dolphin's* a small ship and jammed with equipment."

"No," she said. "This is a peculiar situation. This asteroid is a lodestone. We're held here by magnetism and the crash jammed our escape equipment and our port jets. We can't blast loose and we can't get out of the ship. We're running out of air and—"

"Lodestone!" I snorted.

"Be quiet," she snapped, "and listen. This asteroid, about thirty miles in diameter, apparently wandered into this System from outside. It's composed entirely of some extremely dense metal and is highly—you'll never believe how highly—magnetized. We saw it in our screen and shifted course just a touch to pass it by. But we entered its magnetic field and before we knew it we'd crashed."

"You should have blasted out . . ."

"I know," she broke in impatiently, "but whoever in space heard of a powerful magnet thirty miles in diameter? We were trapped before we realized it. Of course we blasted. That's why we're not flattened, dead."

"Well, hang on. I've got to get help."

I CALLED for Cap on the intercom and he came in from the navigation room. His face remained calm—it always would—as I briefed him on the situation. He ran reflective fingers through his silver hair and his startling blue eyes widened appreciatively at Captain Wall on the screen.

"Better get Carroll," he said.

I got some Somnol antidote from the medicine chest and went into the "dormitory" where our salvage men were lashed unconscious to their bunks. I injected the solution and jumped back.

The seven-foot giant came out of it fighting, snapping his lashings like twine, but I stayed out of reach until he could focus. He gave me his gentle smile.

"Are we there, Jake?" he asked in his soft, crooning voice.

"No," I showed him the needle.

"Emergency. Praise Allah, I was able to stay out of your way. You nearly broke my jaw the last time I brought you out of it."

"I still feel sorry about that, Jake," he said remorsefully. "What's up now?"

We went into the pilot's compartment and Carroll actually did whistle at the redhead. There was nothing offensive in it, though and she smiled at him. I brought him up to date and he spoke to her.

"How far does this magnetic field extend, Captain, ma'am?"

"It pulled strongly at an estimated three-quarters of a mile," she said. "Its attraction increases, of course, at a calculable ratio the closer you get."

"I see. Then if we stay out for a mile and match your drift we should be safe."

She frowned. "You may have to use power to keep clear but I think a mile would be safe."

"First thing then is to find you," Carroll said. "After we locate you you'd better cut off your power. Don't come in unless we call you."

"Right," she said.

We tuned our indicators, found the ship and shifted course until the magnetic asteroid was dead ahead. It was

going away from us and traveling almost as fast as we were. At that rate we would be 72 hours reaching it.

"Kick in the drive," I told Pat.

He did and the pull of acceleration gave us weight for a while until we built up speed. I looked at the vision on the screen.

"I didn't like that crack about pirates," I said, "and I think I'll sue you if I can rescue you and get you into court. You may sign off now. Save power."

Her face lost none of its hardness as she stared levelly at me for an instant before the screen blanked out.

"Pirates!" I growled. "I wonder who started that."

"Well," Cap said slowly, "I suppose it was Amos T. Grubb. Couldn't have been anybody else."

"I don't believe it. He's a nasty-dispositioned little man but he's honest. He admitted he had no part in that load of herculium we salvaged from the *Astralot*."

"Then why did the government impose the bulk of it?"

"I've been breaking my head over that," I said, "ever since that marshal served the notice. He didn't know anything or care. That's for sure. Even so, even if Grubb is behind it, where does this 'pirates' come into the deal? He was there. He knows the ship was a derelect."

"It'll come out in the wash," Carroll interposed gently. "There she comes!"

It was only a round black dot on our screen but it grew into an irregularly shaped oval with a bump—the disabled space-ship.

"Orbit?" Pat asked Cap.

"Yes, at about five miles. We'll look it over."

Pat altered course and presently we were describing a traveling sort of circle of forty-mile diameter which formed the base of an imaginary inverted cone, of which the *Andromeda* was the apex.

The ship lay tight against the asteroid, the surface of which huge hunk of metal was pitted here and there, looking as if it had had a mighty bad case of small-box at one time. We adjusted a viewing port to maximum magnification and the three of us studied the situation.

"If we had about fifty tugs," Cap said reflectively, "and if we could get lines aboard we might be able to haul her off. The way we're fixed it's impossible."

"I guess so," I admitted reluctantly. "That would really be a prize though. Who belongs to that ship, anyway? We might contract to salvage her later and if the owners have any dough they might go high enough to justify a fleet of tugs."

PAT was already looking up the registration. He gave a soft "Oh-oh!" and chuckled. "Solar System Salvage Company, Limited," he announced.

"My, my," I said, "this really will be fun."

"And," Pat went on, "Philemon Wall is president and general mucky-muck. Wonder if that pretty captain is any relation?"

"Daughter," Carroll said. "I remember now. Her maiden trip, headed for Arcton, I think."

"Well, well," I said, and I actually rubbed my hands together. "I now understand her reaction when she found Space Salvage answering her S.O.S. When word gets around the System that our little one-ship outfit saved the big—"

"If you save 'em," Cap cut in cautiously. "Their escape hatches are jammed against the surface."

"I want to get closer," I said. "Maybe I can come up with an idea. Take us in till you feel the pull, Pat, then hold us just outside the magnetic field."

Pat maneuvered us closer, cautiously as a man slipping up on a sleeping tiger. We all felt a curious shift. It was something like coming into a gravitational field where you begin to feel weight, but it was different, too. The difference can't be described—there aren't words for it. But we felt it and Pat blasted out. Our imaginations could picture what would happen if we got too far into that field.

"I'm going down," I said.

"How?" Cap asked. "Our life boat is metal. You'd never be able to blast loose."

"I'll go on a line. We're only a little over a mile out. Hook onto a bosun's chair and reel me out on a winch."

"It may not work, Jake," Carroll said dubiously. "I doubt if the gravitational field of that hunk of ore is strong enough to exert a pull on a small body like you and if we're outside the magnetic field nothing will pull you. You'll need power."

I thought this over. "Then I'll take the life raft into the magnetic field," I

said. "You can hold it there while I transfer to the bosun's chair. We'll stick a metal plate on it and I'll be pulled all right. Then you haul in the life boat."

It was a rather roundabout method of getting from one place to another but it worked. I had a talker inside my space helmet naturally and Carroll took my directions without question. It was comforting to know that he and Cap were at the other end of the line that could mean life or death.

It's an odd sensation to dangle at the end of a thin cable and feel yourself being drawn down by some other force than gravity. Of course, gravity was a factor present there but negligible. Naked, you could have jumped a thousand feet on the asteroid—if you didn't have metal fillings in your teeth. But if you had nails in your shoes you had trouble walking.

The cable began to creak and pop as I got nearer the colossal magnet and the attraction between it and the metal plate on my bosun's chair multiplied foot by foot. When I reached the surface I didn't have to worry about anchoring my chair.

That metal plate began to quiver when I was five feet from the surface and I jumped clear. If it had pulled loose the stretch on that cable would have adjusted with a snap that could very well have left my head behind. The plate thunked against the asteroid and held the chair still.

I made a tour of inspection. The *Andromeda's* mile-long hull was dented here and there along the lower side and although escape hatches and ports were not sprung open they were jammed so they couldn't be operated. I called Carroll.

"Get in touch with the ship," I said. "Ask the red-head if all the personnel have leak-proof space suits. We'll have to bust the pilot's observation shell and take 'em out one at a time."

Carroll groaned. "That sure will put a load on our winch and we'll have to use the lifeboat each time."

"We'll take them just to the lifeboat inside the field," I said. "We can crowd about thirty in it. That way we'll only need it twice."

"Okay. Wait a minute."

Presently he said, "Jake? Trouble. She complains that if you pull out the observation shell it'll wreck their flagship beyond all hope of salvage."

"That's just too bad," I said. "Ask her does she want to give up breathing. That's what'll happen and it won't be long."

"Furthermore," Carroll added, and I could visualize the grin that went with it, "she says that wrecking the ship is deliberate. Trying to cripple a rival. She says that if she were outside in your place she'd figure out something sensible."

"Tell her to come on out. Lots of room here. Tell her she's going to do it my way, or we'll shove off. This is costing us money. We've got a job waiting on Arcton—hey, that's where they're heading, too! Well, anyway, tell her."

So they were going to Arcton, where that shuttle ship was down 100 feet in a 10-mile lake of ooze, eh? That gave me food for thought. It wouldn't be the first time Solar Salvage had moved in ahead of lesser rivals and stolen a job. But I grinned. This part of their equipment wasn't going anywhere until I said so.

"It's okay, Jake," Carroll's voice said. "She's madder than a wet cat but admits you've got her by the short hair. What now?"

"Tell all passengers to get into space-suits and test them thoroughly. Avoid exertion. It'll be better for 'em to lie down until we're ready for 'em. The smaller ones get in one group, we may be able to take them two at a time. Leave all metal objects aboard. We don't want to add to the load on our winch."

"Then—and this is important, Carroll—tell the engineers to remove that observation shell. Just shove it aside. It's quartz and won't go anywhere. I have schemed up a cute gag."

"What?"

I shook my head, even though he couldn't see me. "No, it's not clear yet. I'll have to have your help anyway but if it works you'll see the maddest people in the System."

"Okay, here goes."

I WAITED there beside the *Andromeda*, the blackness of space lighted only by the indescribable beauty of the stars. Half an hour later I saw the hiss of air through vents stirring dust on the ground around the ship. I had forgotten to warn them to blow out the air before loosening the shell. The sudden exposure of a pressurized vessel to complete vacuum could very well have jammed

everything, passengers, machinery and navigational charts into that small opening.

That would have torn space-suits—and I retched, thinking of those exploded bodies I had seen months before on the *Astralot*.

Somebody had thought of it, though, and the shell came off with no trouble. Somebody nudged it clear of the opening and it floated gently to the surface of the asteroid.

"Here we go," I told Carroll. "Haul in, handsome."

The cable creaked, stretched, and the bosun's chair swung loose.

"Hold it," I said, and climbed in. "Now this is going to be tough. This end of the cable will tend to remain in constant ratio to the *Dolphin*."

"When Pat gets into the correct orbit, with the pilot's cabin on this ship as its exact center, he'll have to hold it. I want to go about five hundred feet forward, that is, forward of this ship. Pat can figure how to move the whole orbit. But take it easy. I don't want to whang into this derelict."

"That's no derelict, Jake. It's just a salvage job."

"That slipped out," I said. "We'll see. I don't want to swing into it anyway, so keep me clear."

Almost imperceptibly, I began to move in a course parallel to the length of the ship. I didn't feel any real anxiety, although I knew what would happen if the highly magnetized hull should suddenly exert greater attraction for my chair plate than did the asteroid. I'd swing like a bullet against the ship, which could mean death or lesser complications.

When I was opposite the pilot's compartment, I said, "Haul in about a hundred feet, so I'll be level with the opening. Then maneuver me over it. Pat can see me now."

They took me over the opening and lowered me to the hull. Helmeted faces peered up at me like strange, apprehensive fish in round globes. I motioned to two undersized women, shoved them into my vacated bosun's chair and told Carroll to take it away.

"Put Cap in the lifeboat," I said, "and hold him by a line just inside the field. We ought to do this in three or four hours."

It was probably the weirdest mass

rescue in history, using equipment more adapted to sea rescues than in a vacuum where nothing ordinarily has weight.

Finally we had them all out except the captain. She refused to go. She and I couldn't communicate, except by sign language but the names she called me, and I her, were crystal clear to both of us. Her eyes were a furious green, her face almost as red as her hair.

It got redder when I applied a simple if primitive solution to the deadlock. I simply tucked her under one arm—she didn't weigh anything, of course—grabbed hold of the chair and ordered Carroll to hoist away. She kicked and squirmed and I suppose swore fervently inside her helmet but she didn't have a salvage man's muscles.

Since it was the last load, we bypassed the life raft. Carroll hauled us directly aboard, then maneuvered the life boat in and we battened down. I stripped off my vacuum suit and pushed my way through our milling crowd of visitors to the pilot's cabin.

"Nice going," I said to Pat.

"It was easy," he said, "as soon as I hit the right orbit."

"Easy for you, maybe," I said, "but—oh, skip it. I'm not going to break my arm patting your back. Just keep us out of the magnetic field but continue to hold us where we are in relation to the asteroid."

He nodded his grizzled head. "Something doing?"

"You can bet it'll be something," I said. "Just what remains to be seen."

Cap and Carroll came in together, Carroll's seven-foot height dominating the cabin but his gentle manner at the same time somehow making you unconscious of his size.

"How's the winch?" I asked.

He grinned. "The winch is okay but you're going to have plenty trouble with the winch."

"The redhead? Why?"

"When that first batch came aboard and got out of their suits—oh, by the way, that's something! Some of the women didn't know they could wear ordinary clothes under a space suit, and they stripped pretty close to the buff before climbing into them. Now they're hot and complaining. They don't have any other clothes."

"The solution is obvious," I said. "We don't have any women's clothes aboard."

They either keep their suits on—or take 'em off. I don't care which."

"But preferably the latter, eh?" Carroll chuckled. "Well, I was saying—when the first batch came aboard, they were excited and maybe talked a little louder than they would otherwise. Seems there's a big shot from Solar aboard and he was headed for Arcton to make us a proposition—about herculium."

HE paused. "And?" I prodded. "Well, I had to put bits and pieces together that I overheard, but I think that piracy rumor originated in Solar simply to hold up our sale of the salvaged cargo until they could dicker."

"But why? And where does the red-head come in?"

"Oh, that's different. She's afraid you're going to steal her ship, her first command. That's why she tried to stay aboard to maintain a legal status of ownership."

"Let's have her in," I said grimly. "I'm beginning to get annoyed."

"Maybe," Cap said calmly, "you'd better let me do the talking, Jake."

"Why?" I demanded. "There's nothing wrong with my voice."

"I know, but you're hotheaded, and—"

"Is that an order, Captain?" I asked.

"Not at all," he said, smiling. "I'll back your play."

It must seem plenty crazy for the mate of a vessel to take precedence over the captain but there's a logical explanation. We were all in this salvage business together—Cap Lane, Pat, Carroll, a couple of other boys and me.

While we each had our jobs and duties and specialties, we were a close-knit little band, working on equal terms and shares and fighting every cubic foot of space against Solar Salvage System, Limited, that big octopus of the spaceways, that bloated and powerful monopoly that did not like competition from lesser independent companies.

We had finally made a strike in the salvaging of the *Astralot* with its load of wellnigh priceless herculium and for the first time we bade fair to get out from under the crushing influence of Solar Salvage. With at last enough wealth to finance our undertakings we could get our backs away from the wall. And the big outfit was fighting like fury to prevent our escape from its domination.

I turned to Carroll. "Send the *Andromeda* mob to the lower deck. They'll have to double up or more, for sleeping. They have their own officers. It's up to them to keep order. Bring Cutie-Pie in here."

Captain Helen Wall was still stormy but under control. Her uniform, of which I had seen only the top half in our screen, was a dandy creation that did plenty for her as it went on down to her special crepe-soled boots. She glanced out the viewing port, then glared at me.

"May I ask why we are not under drive, Mr. Murchison?"

"I don't believe my colleagues have been formally presented, Captain Wall," I said. I made introductions. She fidgeted through them and repeated her question.

"It's like this, Captain," I explained. "Your ship represents a huge investment. I'd like the salvage contract."

She laughed scornfully. "Would Solar System, Limited, the biggest and best outfit in the space salvage business, be likely to give the contract to somebody else?"

"But we're on the scene," I pointed out. "We have all the navigational data necessary to find this asteroid again." I questioned Pat with my eyebrows.

"I worked it out," he said.

She hesitated, drawing her nice, dark brows together. "So have I."

"But you didn't bring it from your ship."

"What makes you think I didn't?" she flared.

"Your attitude, of course. You wouldn't have hesitated."

She hesitated again. "Just how would you propose to free my ship?"

I smiled and wagged a finger. "Trade secret."

She nodded shortly. "I can't make the decision myself."

"But there's a Solar executive aboard who can. Let's have him in."

Her eyes widened. "How did you know?" Then she shrugged. "Never mind. All right. He's the one to decide."

"Will you get him?"

SHE went out.

"What if this Solar official refuses?" Cap asked. "We're wasting time."

I grinned at him. "I hope he does."

"Why? What'll that get us?"

I widened my grin. "Another fortune."

"Another one we can't spend?" he asked in pardonable irony.

Helen Wall came back with a youngish man who was almost as big as Carroll. He had short blond hair, wide blue eyes, a wider smile and a front-office hand-shake.

"Our meeting is both fortunate and unfortunate," he said in the manner of a man about to drag out the mining shares and show you what a bargain they were. "Fortunate, because it is earlier than I anticipated, unfortunate because—" He gestured at the port view and shrugged.

His name was Oliver Clayborne if anybody cared. Helen, I noticed, followed his words with parted-lips attention. If anybody cared—I said it again to myself—if anybody cared.

"Captain Wall"—he gave her a smile reserved exclusively for her—"has explained your proposition. I am afraid Solar can't make any such contract. The matter is out of our hands."

"Into whose?"

"The insurance company's. A prominent member of our legal staff is aboard and he assures me that we are covered. If the insurance company wants to salvage the ship it will naturally call for bids."

"I—see," I said. "As far as your company is concerned the *Andromeda* is abandoned?"

"Definitely," he said.

Cap stiffened. He saw what I was driving at.

"That settles that, then." I raised my voice. "But it doesn't settle certain slanders which I understand originated with Solar. Piracy, for instance."

"Oh, that." He laughed boyishly. "That was a mistake. We will file an apology and retraction with the proper authorities. We acted in good faith but our information was faulty."

"The heck it was. You didn't have *any* information. You dreamed that up so our cargo would be impounded. But why?"

He thought. You could see he was thinking carefully.

"You make an accusation, then follow it with a question," he said, making each word a work of art. "I can hardly reply to them both. But I will say this. You blasted off before I could reach you for a conference. My company wanted to dicker with you for a part of your her-

culium cargo and turn our chemists loose on it. We are no longer interested."

"Why?"

He gave us—he played to the whole audience—his smile of mystery. Helen was now looking dubious.

"I'm not at liberty to say," Clayborne purred.

"But I am," Carroll put in suddenly. We all looked at him.

"I can add two and two," he said without heat. "Like I said, Jake. Bits and pieces. Remember that little guy, Phamign, who invented the foundering process for herculium?"

"Of course."

"And remember my grandfather's book, *Space Pirate*? Well, he had an interesting observation in there, just one line, about Professor Phamign. Before I tell you what, let me explain what happened to us. It had to be that way! It's the only way all the facts fit."

Junior began to lose his boyish look. It was obvious he knew something about what Carroll was driving at. He was now a shrewd, wary business man. He watched Carroll intently.

"What happened," Carroll said, "was that Solar would give its eye teeth for the herculium process. If they could get it and if they could flood the market with it before we could sell our cargo the stuff would depreciate in value to where we wouldn't be the richest salvage outfit in the System."

Junior snorted but it was weak.

"One way to do this," Carroll went on, "was to tie up our cargo, then dicker with us for a few samples, then keep the cargo tied up until their chemists could work it out. Stupid, of course, because it can't be analyzed. Never mind why. I know why but I'm not telling Solar."

"Anything can be analyzed," I said.

"Not this stuff. I'll explain some time. Now what happens? Solar loses interest in dickering. There's only one reason to account for this. Somebody has taken time to read *Space Pirate*. It says, along toward the end, that Phamign left his notes in a secret place and the secret died with him. They figure it'll cost less to find out what became of those notes than to go through with their original plan. Doesn't it add up?"

"Very clever deduction," Junior said casually. "If true."

"It rings bells," I said. "But why

hasn't somebody tried to find this secret place before?"

"Well, it was a long time after Phamign died that my grandpop wrote his book and practically nobody read it but his relatives. It wasn't a very good book. It was generally accepted that herculium was a lost process. Then we show up with a shipload of it. The resultant publicity about the *Astralot* aroused somebody's interest enough to look up a copy of *Space Pirate*. When Solar got hold of it they went hunting."

"Got anything to say to that?" I asked Junior.

"Not a thing," he said pleasantly.

"Meanwhile," Carroll said, "word got around the System that we're pirates. Shall I slug him?"

"Let me," I growled, and let go a haymaker.

It only made him blink. Actually, I don't know whether he ever finished the blink or not. I only saw it start. After that, his fist and my glass jaw took over.

WHEN I came to Junior was still out. I rubbed my jaw, peeled myself off the forward bulkhead and took stock. They were like a table, not moving. Carroll, Cap and Pat were at ease but Helen stared at Junior with worried eyes. If anybody cared.

"Did I do that?" I asked, looking at Junior, who lay on his back with an idiot smile on his face, a bruise on his jaw.

"You may have softened him up a little," Carroll said doubtfully. "I had to give him the Sunday punch."

Junior opened his big blue eyes just then and got up. He rubbed the clean line of his jaw. "Somebody is going to suffer for this," he said softly. Softly but not gently.

Carroll squared his massive shoulders. "More?" he asked pleasantly.

"In court," Junior said hastily.

I cut in. "Clayborne, you and Captain Wall go to the navigation room. Consider yourself confined there. I don't want you under foot while we salvage that derelict."

Her eyes shot green sparks again. "Derelict?" she blazed. "That's no derelict."

"The representative of your company"—I gestured at Junior—"qualified to make decisions said the *Andromeda* is an abandoned vessel. That makes it a derelict. It's a big prize and I intend to have it."

"He said nothing of the—" She stopped, thought. "Yes, he did. I remember." She flicked him a green glare and muttered, "Nice going."

Junior had been looking thoughtful during this exchange. Now he turned on his exclusive smile for Helen. "He'll have to set us down somewhere while he arranges for tugs, Captain Wall. I can get an injunction against him in fifteen minutes."

"Except that we're going to salvage it here and now," I said.

"Impossible," he scoffed.

I only shrugged and he looked thoughtful again.

"You have a great reputation as an ingenious salvage man, Mr. Murchison," he said. "If you say you can do it, perhaps you can. Of course, you realize that you and such members of your crew as are involved will spend the rest of your years on Kragor."

That jolted even Cap. He blinked. "Kragor? Why?"

"Piracy," Junior said with a superior grin.

I moved toward him again, but Carroll was closer. He spun Junior around to face him.

"I don't like that word," Carroll said gently. "Don't use it."

Junior didn't flinch. I had to give him that. He looked steadily up at Carroll's glinting eyes.

"Please," Junior said and twitched his arm. Carroll took his hand away and Junior backed up a pace. He swept us all with serious eyes. "You reported first that you couldn't get the *Andromeda* off but that you could save the passengers. You did this by admirable means.

"But you ordered no metal objects to be taken out for plausible reasons. It so happens that the *Andromeda* is carrying about two hundred tons of bullion, representing a considerable fortune. We also had a number of wealthy passengers aboard who had a great deal of dress jewelry. This was abandoned too."

Came then a dramatic pause, but it wasn't calculated. Pretty Boy wasn't acting now. Nobody spoke. I don't think anybody could see what was coming. I couldn't, anyway.

"It was a clever scheme," he said directly to me, "but you won't get away with it. There are already rumors about your piratic tendencies floating around the System, and a charge still against

you. Maybe it can't be proved but it will add weight to the charge in this instance.

"I think we can show that Mr. Murchison knew he could have brought the *Andromeda* off complete with passengers, but delayed the announcement so that he could literally steal the cargo and passengers' valuables."

"That's stupid," I said. "I didn't think of it until after we were in operation."

"But can you make a court," he purred, "already aware of your reputation, believe it?"

"I'll come to that when I get to it," I said. "Now, beat it."

HE turned to go, taking Helen by the arm. She held back for a moment to look at me. She looked puzzled, angry, and speculative all at the same time. A neat trick. Then she went out with him.

Cap finally broke the long silence. "Well, Wonder Boy?"

I took a deep breath. "Very interesting," I said "I wonder if he could make any of that stick."

"It depends," Cap said slowly, "on how much of it was true."

"None of it," I snorted. "The decision's up to you, Cap. I can get that ship off and under power. Shall we do it or back down and leave it there?"

"I don't like backing down," he said shortly. "How will you do it?"

"With those electro-hydraulic jacks. Now, don't look so skeptical. When they're fully opened, they're almost a mile long. I figure we can jack the ship up that far and the magnetic pull, which will be at the points of contact mainly, will be weak enough so that we can tow her free. If we can get her power plant operating, she might be able to blast off with no help."

"That's sheer nonsense, Jake," Cap said. "You can't place them right first of all and all you'll do is lose a couple of pieces of expensive equipment and maybe get yourself killed."

"I'll lose the equipment, all right. We'll have to abandon the jacks. As for the other, I'll be careful."

Cap shrugged. I took that as consent and Carroll and I got to work.

* * * * *

Pat put us barely inside the field. I climbed on the first jack and Carroll started lowering away. We had two

cables on it, unreeling from two winches in unison. One cable alone would have snapped. The base of each jack was a square about forty feet to the side.

The twin cables began to creak a little when I was nearly down and I had Carroll hold it. I did some fancy figuring in my head and calculated we could make it without snapping the lines. I had picked a spot on each side of the ship for placing the jacks. An irregularity of the asteroid's surface, that looked like a pockmark from a distance, existed on each side, which would tilt the base of each jack so that it would meet the hull at a desirable angle.

"Take me ten feet nearer the port side," I ordered.

It wasn't long before I was directly over the spot. Pat was an expert by this time at moving that imaginary cone.

"Lower away easy."

Carroll inched me down, and the cables chattered away like girls home for Christmas. I climbed down the jack and lay on the edge of the base to peer under. When it was within six inches of the surface, I stepped off.

"Pray," I said, "and let go."

It thunked against the asteroid with a jar that almost loosened my teeth. It touched the high edge of the slanted area first of course. The top of it snapped over against the *Andromeda* just as if it had eyes.

"Perfect," I said. "Wait'll I cast loose and haul me in."

The second trip down was just like the first except for a smashed finger.

"Come on down. You're going to pilot her out of here," I told Carroll. "I wish I could do it myself but you know more about these big jobs than I do."

Cap let Carroll down in the bosun's seat and we attached the twin cables to the *Andromeda's* towing eye. Then Carroll waved good-by to me and went inside to make the ship tight and pump some air into her.

I brought down power lines for the two jacks and plugged in. Then I went aboard for the last time. I fixed the power lines to the main generator so they'd pull loose and be left behind if and when we took off.

And all of a sudden Carroll's face was in our screen, his soft voice in our ears.

"*Andromeda* calling. Maybe we'll do it, Jake. If we don't so long."

"What do you mean, so long?"

"If those jacks lift me off," he pointed out, "and something goes wrong, I'm going to get quite a bump."

Bump was right. With his port jets disabled he couldn't pull off under his own steam. And if that tremendous ship plunged 100, 50 or even 25 feet against the asteroid again, something would cave in, air would blow out taking Carroll with it.

He would explode like a— I retched again, remembering. The ship crashed originally under full power with her hull in perfect condition and even then almost stove in her sides. But now . . .

"Oh, Lord!" I said. "I hadn't thought of it. Come on aboard, Carroll. Forget the whole thing."

"No, I'll stay."

"I'm ordering you."

"And I'm defying your order, Jake," he said gently. "There's no way you can get to me to enforce an order. You can either try to get me off here or abandon me. I want to try your scheme. Maybe it'll work."

"You order him," I said to Cap.

"It won't do any good, Jake," Cap said. He spoke at the screen. "I'm not going to make a speech, Carroll. Good luck."

CARROLL grinned. Suddenly his eyes shifted and widened. I looked behind me.

She stood there, her hair as red as ever, her eyes as green, but she had a new look. It was supplication.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Murchison," she said meekly. "But please let me watch. That's my ship." She had tears in her voice.

I didn't put an arm around her. I didn't give her a soft caress and murmur nothings. I just nodded and waved at the viewing port.

I stood at a jury-rigged control panel. "Ready?" I asked Carroll.

"Shoot," he said. "But watch out for me. Once I'm off the surface, I'll blast the main drive if anything starts to go wrong. I might pull out the winches or snap the lines. Somebody ought to stand by the winches to chop the lines if necessary."

"I'll go," Cap said. "Sing out if anything happens."

I eased juice into the jacks, watching the viewing port like a sucker in a shell game. The big ship seemed to move a little, *did move* a little! Up, up, up she

came, an inch at a time, and I began to take in slack on the towing lines.

"How's it seem?" I asked.

"A l-little sh-shaky, Jake," he quavered. Then he chuckled. "No more than my voice, though."

"You've got a right," I said grimly. "Now's your last chance to call it off. It gets dangerous after this."

"Keep goin'."

Helen threw a glance at the screen. There were tears in her eyes and a wistful smile on her mouth.

Up, up, up—then—

"Something you didn't think of, Jake," Pat said quietly.

I didn't even look at him. "Yeah?"

"As that ship approaches to, a strong magnetic attraction is created between us. While it has some tendency to pull the big ship toward us the stronger attraction is in that direction. By the time those jacks are fully extended we'll bump, throw the big ship off the jacks and hell's to pay."

If groaning would have helped, I'd have made an all-time record. "And we can't ease off as it approaches," I said, "because of the power lines. They're not on reels."

I pointed this out to Carroll. "It's my stupidity," I said. "I should have thought of it. We can't quit now but it looks like we can't go ahead, either."

"That is serious," he said. "Well, when we reach the last possible foot, we'll have to blast together and hope."

"I can keep clear for quite awhile," Pat said, "by increasing power. There'll come a time, though."

"Okay, play it that way. Stand by the winches!" I called to Cap.

"Aye, aye," his voice replied on the intercom.

Up, up, up. And our drive throbbing a little harder minute by minute until we were almost at full blast and the *Andromeda* a half mile from the surface of the asteroid.

"I can't hold it off any longer," Pat said. "I'll change course now to make a straight run over him and we'll blast when I signal."

"Get ready, Carroll. This is it."

He nodded, held up two crossed fingers and grinned. I knew I would never forget that grin, that gentle voice.

"When I count three," Pat said. "One—two—THREE!"

"Full blast!"

Our engines roared full-throated and flame sprayed from the stern of the *Andromeda*.

"Let the winches roll free!" I yelled.

The towing lines tautened, and I could hear the winches sing as we sped away from Carroll. Then their song dropped from the high insane keening.

"Pull, for Pete's sake!" Carroll said.

"Haul in!" I ordered.

It was as if we'd hit a wall of water. But not, praise Allah, a wall of brick. Carroll yelled suddenly like a cheer leader.

"We made it, Jake, *we made it!* I'm clear. Full speed ahead, boys, for dear old Arcton. Let me have all the cable you can, Jake. I'll just let you tow me. Put me in an orbit around Arcton and send tugs out to get me. I can't land this heap alone."

WELL, there was dancing and cheering—and a little crying by Helen, happy crying.

This went on for some time until the same words occurred to us all—pirates and Kragor!

Kragor, where no ships called except to deliver new customers. Where convicted pirates lived with no tools but bare hands and teeth and nothing to make tools with. Where they fought each other and the six-legged Kragorian hounds.

"Get Junior in," I said.

Helen went after him and brought him back, big smile and all. He glanced at the viewing port.

"Congratulations," he said. "A magnificent job."

"All in vain?" I asked.

"All in vain."

"Listen," I said. "I've got a confession to make. I *did* think of this method of getting the ship off before she was evacuated. But I knew it was a dangerous procedure. We almost didn't make it at that. My immediate concern was for the safety of the passengers. I might make a court believe that, you know, while you are trying to make a court believe otherwise."

I tried one of his dramatic pauses on for size. It fitted nicely. Everybody glued their eyes to me.

"So I'll make you a proposition. You've intimated that the piracy charge against us is going not only to stand but is to be built up. You also say you

have no interest in our cargo for purposes of analysis.

"Now look—if we can cash in on our herculium we don't need the *Andromeda* as a prize ship or her cargo. We're on Stellar Street with bells on. We can buy and sell Solar Salvage three times over. See what I'm shooting at?"

Junior licked his lips with a pink tongue, like a cat thinking of canned salmon.

"We won't be big shots, is what I mean," I said. "I think I'm speaking for Captain Lane when I say we're not going to go in serious competition with a great company like Solar System Salvage Company, Limited."

I questioned Cap with my eyebrows and he grinned. "You're doing fine, Jake. Go on."

"All we want," I said, "is to call the whole thing off. We'll simply regard this operation as a routine rescue. No reward, no nothing—if you make formal retraction of your charges and allow our cargo to be released. You take it from there, Mr. Clayborne."

Junior licked his lips again, like a cat wondering if the salmon was spoiled, and nodded slowly. "Signed agreement?" he asked.

"With a gold seal," I said.

"Very well then. I'll have our attorney draw up the papers." He turned abruptly and hurried out, like a cat deciding everything was all right.

I looked at Carroll's image. "Did you hear?"

"Enough," he said. "Was your mother scared by a diplomat?"

I turned to Helen. "Funny—" I began, and stopped. I had almost said it aloud. Funny, how many things she could get into her eyes. They had stars, now.

"Captain Wall," I said, "I want to give you back your ship. No strings."

She smiled and I noticed what a pretty mouth she really had.

"No, Jake. I'll see that you get a regular salvage fee, no matter what papers you sign. That was a legitimate job. And you are entitled to reimbursement for the loss of your equipment."

"Th-thanks," I stammered, "but—why?"

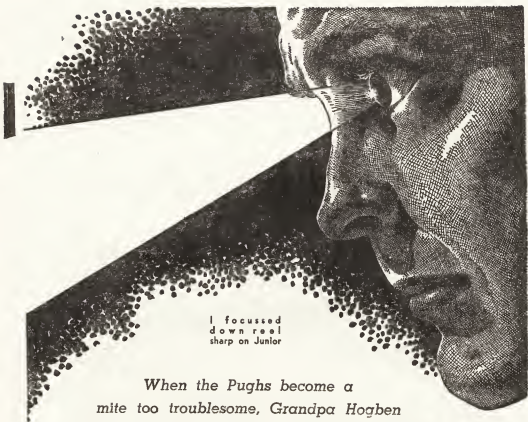
She looked me deep in the eyes and tilted that pretty—I've said it before—mouth.

"Just—because," she said.

COLD WAR

By HENRY KUTTNER





I focussed
down reel
sharp on Junior

*When the Pughs become a
mite too troublesome, Grandpa Hogben
proves himself a creature of infinite resource!*

CHAPTER I

Last of the Pughs

ILL never have a cold in the haid again without I think of little Junior Pugh. Now there was a repulsive brat if ever I saw one. Built like a little gorilla, he was. Fat, pasty face, mean look, eyes so close together you could poke 'em both out at once with one finger. His paw thought the world of him though. Maybe that was natural, seeing as how little Junior was the image of his pap-py.

"The last of the Pughs," the old man used to say, stickin' his chest out and beamin' down at the little gorilla.

"Finest little lad that ever stepped."

It made my blood run cold sometimes to look at the two of 'em together. Kinda sad, now, to think back to those happy days when I didn't know either of 'em. You may not believe it but them two Pughs, father and son, between 'em came within *that* much of conquerin' the world.

Us Hogbens is quiet folks. We like to keep our heads down and lead quiet lives in our own little valley, where nobody comes near withouten we say so. Our neighbors and the folks in the village

A NOVELET OF THE HOGBENS

are used to us by now. They know we try hard not to act conspicuous. They make allowances.

If Paw gets drunk, like last week, and flies down the middle of Main Street in his red underwear most people make out they don't notice, so's not to embarrass Maw. They know he'd walk like a decent Christian if he was sober.

The thing that druv Paw to drink that time was Little Sam, which is our baby we keep in a tank down-cellar, startin' in to teethe again. First time since the War Between the States. We'd figgered he was through teething, but with Little Sam you never can tell. He was mighty restless, too.

A perffesser we keep in a bottle told us once Little Sam e-mitted sub-sonic somethings when he yells but that's just his way of talking. Don't mean a thing. It makes your nerves twiddle, that's all. Paw can't stand it. This time it even woke up Grandpaw in the attic and he hadn't stirred since Christmas. First thing after he got his eyes open he bust out madder'n a wet hen at Paw.

"I see ye, wittold knave that ye are!" he howled. "Flying again, is it? Oh, sic a reowfule sigte! I'll ground ye, ywis!" There was a far-away thump.

"You made me fall a good ten feet!" Paw hollered from away down the valley. "It ain't fair. I could of busted something!"

"Ye'll bust us all, with your dronken carelessness," Grandpaw said. "Flying in full sight of the neighbors! People get burned at the stake for less. You want mankind to find out all about us? Now shut up and let me tend to Baby."

Grandpaw can always quiet the baby if nobody else can. This time he sung him a little song in Sanskrit and after a bit they was snoring a duet.

I was fixing up a dingus for Maw to pour up some cream for sour-cream biscuits. I didn't have much to work with but an old sled and some pieces of wire but I didn't need much. I was trying to point the top end of the wire north-northeast when I seen a pair of checked pants rush by in the woods.

It was Uncle Lem. I could hear him thinking. "It ain't me!" he was saying, real loud, inside his haid. "Git back to yer work, Saunk. I ain't within a mile of you. Yer Uncle Lem's a fine old feller and never tells lies. Think I'd fool ye, Saunkie boy?"

"You shore would," I thunk back. "If you could. What's up, Uncle Lem?"

AT that he slowed down and started to saunter back in a wide circle. "Oh, I just had an idy yer Maw might like a mess of blackberries," he thunk, kicking a pebble very nonchalant. "If anybody asks you say you ain't seen me. It's no lie. You ain't."

"Uncle Lem," I thunk, real loud, "I gave Maw my bounden word I wouldn't let you out of range without me along, account of the last time you got away—"

"Now, now, my boy," Uncle Lem thunk fast. "Let bygones be bygones."

"You just can't say no to a friend, Uncle Lem," I reminded him, taking a last turn of the wire around the runner. "So you wait a shake till I get this cream soured and we'll both go together, wherever it is you have in mind."

I saw the checked pants among the bushes and he come out in the open and give me a guilty smile. Uncle Lem's a fat little feller. He means well, I guess, but he can be talked into most anything by most anybody, which is why we have to keep a close eye on him.

"How you gonna do it?" he asked me, looking at the cream-jug. "Make the little critters work faster?"

"Uncle Lem!" I said. "You know better'n that. Cruelty to dumb animals is something I can't abide. Them there little critters work hard enough souring milk the way it is. They're such teenty-weenty fellers I kinda feel sorry for 'em. Why, you can't even see 'em without you go kinda crosseyed when you look. Paw says they're enzymes. But they can't be. They're too teeny."

"Teeny is as teeny does," Uncle Lem said. "How you gonna do it, then?"

"This here gadget," I told him, kinda proud, "will send Maw's creamjug ahead into next week some time. This weather, don't take cream more'n a couple of days but I'm giving it plenty of time. When I bring it back—bingo, it's sour." I set the jug on the sled.

"I never seen such a do-lass brat," Uncle Lem said, stepping forward and bending a wire crosswise. "You better do it thataway, on account of the thunderstorm next Tuesday. All right now, shoot he. off."

So I shot her off. When she come back, sure enough, the cream was sour enough to walk a mouse. Crawling up the can

there was a hornet from next week, which I squashed. Now that was a mistake. I knowed it the minute I touched the jug. Dang Uncle Lem, anyhow.

He jumped back into the underbrush, squealing real happy.

"Fooled you that time, you young stinker," he yelled back. "Let's see you get your thumb outa the middle of next week!"

It was the time-lag done it. I mighta knowed. When he crossed that wire he didn't have no thunderstorm in mind at all. Took me nigh onto ten minutes to work myself loose, account of some feller called Inertia, who mixes in if you ain't careful when you fiddle around with time. I don't understand much about it myself. I ain't got my growth yet. Uncle Lem says he's already forgot more'n I'll ever know.

With that head start I almost lost him. Didn't even have time to change into my store-bought clothes and I knowed by the way he was all dressed up fit to kill he was headed for somewhere fancy.

He was worried, too. I kept running into little stray worrisome thoughts he'd left behind him, hanging like teeny little mites of clouds on the bushes. Couldn't make out much on account of they was shredding away by the time I got there but he'd shore done something he shouldn't. That much *anybody* coulda told. They went something like this:

"Worry, worry—wish I hadn't done it—oh, heaven help me if Grandpaw ever finds out—oh, them nasty Pughs, how could 'a-been such a fool? Worry, worry—pore ole feller, such a good soul, too, never done nobody no harm and look at me now.

"That Saunk, too big for his britches, teach him a thing or two, ha-ha. Oh, worry, worry—never mind, brace up, you good ole boy, everything's bound to turn out right in the end. You deserve the best, bless you, Lemuel. Grandpaw'll never find out."

Well, I seen his checkered britches high-tailing through the woods after a bit but I didn't catch up to him until he was down the hill, across the picnic grounds at the edge of town and pounding on the si" of the ticket-window at the railroad station with a Spanish dubloon he snitched from Paw's sea-chest.

It didn't surprise me none to hear him asking for a ticket to State Center. I

let him think I hadn't caught up. He argued something turrrible with the man behind the window but finally he dug down in his britches and fetched up a silver dollar, and the man calmed down.

The train was already puffing up smoke behind the station when Uncle Lem darted around the corner. Didn't leave me much time but I made it too—just. I had to fly a little over the last half-dozen yards but I don't think anybody noticed.

ONCE when I was just a little shaver there was a Great Plague in London, where we were living at the time, and all us Hogbans had to clear out. I remember the hullabaloo in the city but looking back now it don't seem a patch on the hullabaloo in State Center station when the train pulled in. Times have changed, I guess.

Whistles blowing, horns honking, radios yelling bloody murder — seems like every invention in the 'ast two hundred years has been noisier than the one before it. Made my head ache until I fixed up something Paw once called a raised decibel threshold, which was pure showing-off.

Uncle Lem didn't know I was anywhere around. I took care to think real quiet but he was so wrapped up in his worries he wasn't paying no mind to nothing. I followed him through the crowds in the station and out onto a wide street full of traffic. It was a relief to get away from the trains.

I always hate to think what's going on inside the boiler, with all the little bitty critters so small you can't hardly see 'em, pore things, flying around all hot and excited and bashing their heads together. It seems plumb pitiable.

Of course, it just don't do to think what's happening inside the automobiles that go by.

Uncle Lem knowed right where he was headed. He took off down the street so fast I had to keep reminding myself not to fly, trying to keep up. I kept thinking I ought to get in touch with the folks at home, in case this turned into something I couldn't handle, but I was plumb stopped everywhere I turned. Maw was at the church sociable that afternoon and she whopped me the last time I spoke to her outa thin air right in front of the Reverend Jones. He ain't used to us Hogbans yet.

Paw was daid drunk. No good trying to wake him up. And I was scared to death I *would* wake the baby if I tried to call on Grandpaw.

Uncle Lem scuttled right along, his checkered legs a-tinkling. He was worrying at the top of his mind, too. He'd caught sight of a crowd in a side-street gathered around a big truck, looking up at a man standing on it and waving bottles in both hands.

He seemed to be making a speech about headaches. I could hear him all the way to the corner. There was big banners tacked along the sides of the truck that said, PUGH HEADACHE CURE.

"Oh, worry, worry!" Uncle Lem thunk. "Oh, bless my toes, what *am* I going to do? I never *dreamed* anybody'd marry Lily Lou Mutz. Oh, worry!"

Well, I reckon we'd all been surprised when Lily Lou Mutz up and got herself a husband awhile back—around ten years ago, I figgered. But what it had to do with Uncle Lem I couldn't think. Lily Lou was just about the ugliest female that ever walked. Ugly ain't no word for her, pore gal.

Grandpaw said once she put him in mind of a family name of Gorgon he used to know. Not that she wasn't a good-hearted critter. Being so ugly, she put up with a lot in the way of rough acting-up from the folks in the village—the riff-raff lot, I mean.

She lived by herself in a little shack up the mountain and she musta been close onto forty when some feller from the other side of the river come along one day and rocked the whole valley right back on its heels by asking her to marry up with him. Never saw the feller myself but I heard tell he wasn't no beauty-prize winner neither.

Come to think of it, I told myself right then, looking at the truck—come to think of it, feller's name was Pugh.

standing there watching the feller on the truck selling bottles with both hands.

"Come and get it," he was yelling. "Come and get your bottle of Pugh's Old Reliable Headache Cure while they last!"

"Well, Pugh, here I am," Uncle Lem said, looking up at the big gorilla. "Hello, Junior," he said right afterward, glancing down at the little gorilla. I seen him shudder a little.

You shore couldn't blame him for that. Two nastier specimens of the human race I never did see in all my born days. If they hadn't been *quite* so pasty-faced or just the least mite slimmer, maybe they wouldn't have put me so much in mind of two well-fed slugs, one growed-up and one baby-sized. The paw was all dressed up in a Sunday-meeting suit with a big gold watch-chain across his front and the way he strutted you'd a thought he'd never had a good look in a mirror.

"Howdy, Lem," he said, casual-like. "Right on time, I see. Junior, say howdy to Mister Lem Hogben. You owe Mister Hogben a lot, sonny." And he laughed a mighty nasty laugh.

Junior paid him no mind. He had his beady little eyes fixed on the crowd across the street. He looked about seven years old and mean as they come.

"Shall I do it now, paw?" he asked in a squeaky voice. "Can I let 'em have it now, paw? Huh, paw?" From the tone he used, I looked to see if he'd got a machine-gun handy. I didn't see none but if looks was ever mean enough to kill Junior Pugh could of mowed the crowd right down.

"Manly little feller, ain't he, Lem?" Paw Pugh said, real smug. "I tell you, I'm mighty proud of this youngster. Wish his dear old grandpaw coulda lived to see him. A fine old family line, the Pughs is. Nothing like it anywhere. Only trouble is, Junior's the last of his race. You see why I got in touch with you, Lem."

Uncle Lem shuddered again. "Yep," he said. "I see, all right. But you're wasting your breath, Pugh. I ain't a-gonna do it."

Young Pugh spun around in his tracks.

"Shall I let him have it, paw?" he squeaked, real eager. "Shall I, paw? Now, paw? Huh?"

CHAPTER II

A Fine Old Feller

NEXT thing I knowed, Uncle Lem had spotted somebody under a lamp-post on the sidewalk, at the edge of the crowd. He trotted over. It seemed to be a big gorilla and a little gorilla,

"Shaddup, sonny," the big feller said and he whammed the little feller across the side of the haid. Pugh's hands was like hams. He shore was built like a gorilla.

The way his great big arms swung down from them big hunched shoulders, you'd of thought the kid would go flying across the street when his paw whopped him one. But he was a burly little feller. He just staggered a mite and then shook his haid and went red in the face.

He yelled out, loud and squeaky, "Paw, I warned you! The last time you whammed me I warned you! Now I'm gonna let you have it!"

He drew a deep breath and his two little teeny eyes got so bright I coulda sworn they was gonna touch each other across the middle of his nose. His pasty face got bright red.

"Okay, Junior," Paw Pugh said, real hasty. "The crowd's ready for you. Don't waste your strength on me, sonny. Let the crowd have it!"

Now all this time I was standing at the edge of the crowd, listening and watching Uncle Lem. But just then somebody jiggled my arm and a thin kinda voice said to me, real polite, "Excuse me, but may I ask a question?"

I looked down. It was a skinny man with a kind-hearted face. He had a notebook in his hand.

"It's all right with me," I told him, polite. "Ask away, mister."

"I just wondered how you feel, that's all," the skinny man said, holding his pencil over the notebook ready to write down something.

"Why, peart," I said. "Right kind of you to inquire. Hope you're feeling well too, mister."

He shook his head, kind of dazed. "That's the trouble," he said. "I just don't understand it. I feel fine."

"Why not?" I asked. "Fine day."

"Everybody here feels fine," he went right on, just like I hadn't spoke. "Barring normal odds, everybody's in average good health in this crowd. But in about five minutes or less, as I figure it—" He looked at his wrist-watch.

Just then somebody hit me right on top of the haid with a red-hot sledgehammer.

NOW you shore can't hurt a Hogben by hitting him on the haid. Anybody's a fool to try. I felt my knees

buckle a little but I was all right in a couple of seconds and I looked around to see who'd whammed me.

Wasn't a soul there. But oh my, the moaning and groaning that was going up from that there crowd! People was a-clutching at their foreheads and a-staggering around the street, clawing at each other to get to that truck where the man was handing out the bottles of headache cure as fast as he could take in the dollar bills.

The skinny man with the kind face rolled up his eyes like a duck in thunder.

"Oh, my head!" he groaned. "What did I tell you? Oh, my head!" Then he sort of tottered away, fishing in his pocket for money.

Well, the family always did say I was slow-witted but you'd have to be down-right feeble-minded if you didn't know there was something mighty peculiar going on around here. I'm no ninny, no matter what Maw says. I turned around and looked for Junior Pugh.

There he stood, the fat-faced little varmint, red as a turkey-gobbler, all swole up and his mean little eyes just a-flashing at the crowd.

"It's a hex," I thought to myself, perfectly calm. "I'd never have believed it but it's a real hex. Now how in the world—"

Then I remembered Lily Lou Mutz and what Uncle Lem had been thinking to himself. And I began to see the light.

The crowd had gone plumb crazy, fighting to get at the headache cure. I purty near had to bash my way over towards Uncle Lem. I figgered it was past time I took a hand, on account of him being so soft in the heart and likewise about as soft in the haid.

"Nosirree," he was saying, firm-like. "I won't do it. Not by no manner of means I won't."

"Uncle Lem," I said.

I bet he jumped a yard into the air.

"Saunk!" he squeaked. He flushed up and grinned sheepish and then he looked mad, but I could tell he was kinda relieved, too. "I told you not to foller me," he said.

"Maw told me not to let you out of my sight," I said. "I promised Maw and us Hogbens never break a promise. What's going on here, Uncle Lem?"

"Oh, Saunk, everything's gone dead wrong!" Uncle Lem wailed out. "Here I am with a heart of gold and I'd just as

soon be dead! Meet Mister Ed Pugh, Saunk. He's trying to get me kilt."

"Now Lem," Ed Pugh said. "You know that ain't so. I just want my rights, that's all. Pleased to meet you, young fellow. Another Hogben, I take it. Maybe you can talk your uncle into—"

"Excuse me for interrupting, Mister Pugh," I said, real polite. "But maybe you'd better explain. All this is purely a mystery to me."

He cleared his throat and threw his chest out, important-like. I could tell this was something he liked to talk about. Made him feel pretty big, I could see.

"I don't know if you was acquainted with my dear departed wife, Lily Lou Mutz that was," he said. "This here's our little child, Junior. A fine little lad he is too. What a pity we didn't have eight or ten more just like him." He sighed real deep.

"Well, that's life. I'd hoped to marry young and be blessed with a whole passel of younguns, being as how I'm the last of a fine old line. I don't mean to let it die out, neither." Here he gave Uncle Lem a mean look. Uncle Lem sorta whimpered.

"I ain't a-gonna do it," he said. "You can't make me do it."

"We'll see about that," Ed Pugh said, threatening. "Maybe your young relative here will be more reasonable. I'll have you know I'm getting to be a power in this state and what I says goes."

"Paw," little Junior squeaked out just then, "Paw, they're kinda slowing down. Kin I give it to 'em double-strength this time, Paw? Betcha I could kill a few if I let myself go. Hey, Paw—"

Ed Pugh made as if he was gonna clonk the little varmint again, but I guess he thought better of it.

"Don't interrupt your elders, sonny," he said. "Paw's busy. Just tend to your job and shut up." He glanced out over the moaning crowd. "Give that bunch over beyond the truck a little more treatment," he said. "They ain't buying fast enough. But no double-strength, Junior. You gotta save your energy. You're a growing boy."

HE turned back to me. "Junior's a talented child," he said, very proud. "As you can see. He inherited it from his dear dead-and-gone mother, Lily Lou. I was telling you about Lily Lou. It was my hope to marry young,

like I said, but the way things worked out, somehow I just didn't get around to wifin' till I'd got well along into the prime of life."

He blew out his chest like a toadfrog looking down admiring. I never did see a man that thought better of himself. "Never found a woman who'd look at—I mean, never found the right woman," he went on, "till the day I met Lily Lou Mutz."

"I know what you mean," I said, polite. I did, too. He musta searched a long, long ways before he found somebody ugly enough herself to look twice at him. Even Lily Lou, pore soul, musta thunk a long time afore she said yes.

"And that," Ed Pugh went on, "is where your Uncle Lem comes in. It seems like he'd give Lily Lou a bewitchment quite some while back."

"I never!" Uncle Lem squealed. "And anyway, how'd I know she'd get married and pass it on to her child? Who'd ever think Lily Lou would—"

"He gave her a bewitchment," Ed Pugh went right on talking. "Only she never told me till she was a-layin' on her death-bed a year ago. Lordy, I sure woulda whopped her good if I'd knowed how she held out on me all them years! It was the hex Lemuel gave her and she inherited it on to her little child."

"I only done it to protect her," Uncle Lem said, right quick. "You know I'm speaking the truth, Saunk boy. Pore Lily Lou was so pizon ugly people used to up and heave a clod at her now and then afore they could help themselves. Just automatic-like. Couldn't blame 'em. I often fought down the impulse myself."

"But pore Lily Lou, I shore felt sorry for her. You'll never know how long I fought down my good impulses, Saunk. But my heart of gold does get me into messes. One day I felt so sorry for the pore hideous critter I gave her the hex-power. Anybody'd have done the same, Saunk."

"How'd you do it?" I asked, real interested, thinking it might come in handy someday to know. I'm young yet, and I got lots to learn.

Well, he started to tell me and it was kinda mixed up. Right at first I got a notion some furrin feller named Gene Chromosome had done it for him and after I got straight on that part he'd gone cantering off into a rigamarole about the alpha waves of the brain.

Shucks, I knowed that much my own self. Everybody musta noticed the way them little waves go a-sweeping over the tops of people's haid's when they're thinking. I've watched Grandpaw sometimes when he had as many as six hundred different thoughts follering each other up and down them little paths where is brain is. Hurts my eyes to look too close when Grandpaw's thinking.

"So that's how it is, Saunk," Uncle Lem wound up. "And this here little rattlesnake's inherited the whole shebang."

"Well, why don't you get this here Gene Chromosome feller to unscramble Junior and put him back the way other people are?" I asked. "I can see how easy you could do it. Look here, Uncle Lem." I focused down real sharp on Junior and made my eyes go funny the way you have to when you want to look inside a person.

Sure enough, I seen just what Uncle Lem meant. There was teensy-weensy little chains of fellers, all hanging onto each other for dear life, and skinny little rods jiggling around inside them awful teensy cells everybody's made of—except maybe Little Sam, our baby.

"Look here, Uncle Lem," I said. "All you did when you gave Lily Lou the hex was to twitch these here little rods over *thataway* and patch 'em onto them little chains that wiggle so fast. Now why can't you switch 'em back again and make Junior behave himself? It oughta be easy."

"It would be easy," Uncle Lem kinda sighed at me. "Saunk, you're a scatter-brain. You wasn't listening to what I said. I can't switch 'em back without I kill Junior."

"The world would be a better place," I said.

"I know it would. But you know what we promised Grandpaw? No more killings."

"But Uncle Lem!" I bust out. "This is terrible! You mean this nasty little rattlesnake's gonna go on all his life hexing people?"

"Worse than that, Saunk," pore Uncle Lem said, almost crying. "He's gonna pass the power on to his descendants, just like Lily Lou passed it on to him."

For a minute it sure did look like a dark prospect for the human race. Then I laughed.

"Cheer up, Uncle Lem," I said. "Nothing to worry about. Look at the little toad. There ain't a female critter alive who'd come within a mile of him. Already he's as repulsive as his daddy. And remember, he's Lily Lou Mutz's child, too. Maybe he'll get even horribler as he grows up. On thing's sure—he ain't never gonna get married."

"Now there's where you're wrong," Ed Pugh busted in, talking real loud. He was red in the face and he looked mad. "Don't think I ain't been listening," he said. "And don't think I'm gonna forget what you said about my child. I told you I was getting to be a power in this town. Junior and me can go a long way, using his talent to help us."

"Already I've got onto the board of aldermen here and there's gonna be a vacancy in the state senate come next week—unless the old coot I have in mind's a lot tougher than he looks. So I'm warning you, young Hogben, you and your family's gonna pay for them insults."

"Nobody oughta get mad when he hears the gospel truth about himself," I said. "Junior is a repulsive specimen."

"He just takes getting used to," his paw said. "All us Pughs is hard to understand. Deep, I guess. But we got our pride. And I'm gonna make sure the family line never dies out. Never, do you hear that, Lemuel?"

UNCLE LEM just shut his eyes up tight and shook his head fast. "No-sirree," he said. "I'll never do it. Never, never, never, never—"

"Lemuel," Ed Pugh said, real sinister. "Lemuel, do you want me to set Junior on you?"

"Oh, there ain't no use in that," I said. "You seen him try to hex me along with the crowd, didn't you? No manner of use, Mister Pugh. Can't hex a Hogben."

"Well—" He looked around, searching his mind. "Hm-m. I'll think of something. I'll—soft-hearted, aren't you? Promised your Grandpappy you wouldn't kill nobody, hey? Lemuel, open your eyes and look over there across the street. See that sweet old lady walking with the cane? How'd you like it if I had Junior drop her dead in her tracks?"

Uncle Lemuel just squeezed his eyes tighter shut.

"I won't look. I don't know the sweet old thing. If she's that old, she ain't got much longer anyhow. Maybe she'd be better off dead. Probably got rheumatiz something fierce."

"All right, then, how about that purty young girl with the baby in her arms? Look, Lemuel. Mighty sweet-looking little baby. Pink ribbon in its bonnet, see? Look at them dimples. Junior, get ready to blight them where they stand. Bubonic plague to start with maybe. And after that—"

"Uncle Lem," I said, feeling uneasy. "I dunno what Grandpaw would say to this, Maybe—"

Uncle Lem popped his eyes wide open for just a second. He glared at me, frantic.

"I can't help it if I've got a heart of gold," he said. "I'm a fine old feller and everybody picks on me. Well, I won't stand for it. You can push me just so far. Now I don't care if Ed Pugh kills off the whole human race. I don't care if Grandpaw *does* find out what I done. I don't care a hoot about nothing no more." He gave a kind of wild laugh.

"I'm gonna get out from under. I won't know nothing about nothing. I'm gonna snatch me a few winks, Saunk."

And with that he went rigid all over and fell flat on his face on the sidewalk, stiff as a poker.

CHAPTER III

Over a Barrel

WELL, worried as I was, I had to smile. Uncle Lem's kinda cute sometimes. I knowed he'd put hisself to sleep again, the way he always does when trouble catches up with him. Paw says it's catalepsy but cats sleep a lot lighter than that.

Uncle Lem hit the sidewalk flat and kinda bounced a little. Junior give a howl of joy. I guess maybe he figgered he'd had something to do with Uncle Lem falling over. Anyhow, seeing somebody down and helpless, Junior naturally rushed over and pulled his foot back and kicked Uncle Lem in the side of the haid.

Well, like I said, us Hogbens have got pretty tough haid. Junior let out a

howl. He started dancing around nursing his foot in both hands.

"I'll hex you good!" he yelled at Uncle Lem. "I'll hex you good, you—you ole Hogben, you!" He drew a deep breath and turned purple in the face and—

And then it happened.

It was like a flash of lightning. I don't take no stock in hexes, and I had a fair idea of what was happening, but it took me by surprise. Paw tried to explain to me later how it worked and he said it just stimulated the latent toxins inherent in the organism. It made Junior into a catalytotoxic agent on account of the way the rearrangement of the desoxyribonucleic acid his genes was made of worked on the kappa waves of his nasty little brain, stepping them up as much as thirty microvolts. But shucks, you know Paw. He's too lazy to figger the thing out in English. He just steals them fool words out of other folks' brains when he needs 'em.

What really happened was that all the pizon that little varmint had bottled up in him, ready to let go on the crowd, somehow seemed to r'ar back and smack Uncle Lem right in the face. I never seen such a hex. And the awful part was—it worked.

Because Uncle Lem wasn't resisting a mite now he was asleep. Red-hot pokers wouldn't have waked him up and I wouldn't put redhot pokers past little Junior Pugh. But he didn't need 'em this time. The hex hit Uncle Lem like a thunderbolt.

He turned pale green right before our eyes.

Somehow it seemed to me a turrible silence fell as Uncle Lem went green. I looked up, surprised. Then I realized what was happening. All that pitiful moaning and groaning from the crowd had stopped.

People was swigging away at their bottles of headache cure, rubbing their foreheads and kinda laughing weak-like with relief. Junior's whole complete hex had gone into Uncle Lem and the crowd's headaches had naturally stopped right off.

"What's happened here?" somebody called out in a kinda familiar voice. "Has that man fainted? Why don't you help him? Here, let me by—I'm a doctor."

It was the skinny man with the kind-looking face. He was still drinking out

of the headache bottle as he pushed his way through the crowd toward us but he'd put his notebook away. When he saw Ed Pugh he flushed up angrylike.

"So it's you, is it, Alderman Pugh?" he said. "How is it you're always around when trouble starts? What did you do to this poor man, anyhow? Maybe this time you've gone too far."

"I didn't do a thing," Ed Pugh said. "Never touched him. You watch your tongue, Dr. Brown, or you'll regret it. I'm a powerful man in this here town."

"Look at that!" Dr. Brown yells, his voice going kinda squeaky as he stares down at Uncle Lem. "The man's dying! Call an ambulance, somebody, quick!"

Uncle Lem was changing color again. I had to laugh a little, inside my head. I knowed what was happening and it was kinda funny. Everybody's got a whole herd of germs and viruses and suchlike critters swarming through them all the time, of course.

When Junior's hex hit Uncle Lem it stimulated the entire herd something terrible, and a flock of little bitty critters Paw calls antibodies had to get to work pronto. They ain't really as sick as they look, being white by nature.

Whenever a pizon starts chawing on you these pale little fellers grab up their shooting-irons and run like crazy to the battlefield in your insides. Such fighting and yelling and swearing you never seen. It's a regular Bull Run.

THAT was going on right then inside Uncle Lem. Only us Hogbens have got a special militia of our own inside us. And they got called up real fast.

They was swearing and kicking and whopping the enemy so hard Uncle Lem had gone from pale green to a sort of purplish color, and big yellor and blue spots was beginning to bug out all over him where it showed. He looked uncommon sick. Course it didn't do him no real harm. The Hogbens militia can lick any germ that breathes.

But he sure looked revolting.

The skinny doctor crouched down beside Uncle Lem and felt his pulse.

"Now you've done it," he said, looking up at Ed Pugh. "I don't know how you've worked this, but for once you've gone too far. This man seems to have bubonic plague. I'll see you're put under control this time and that young

Kallikak of yours, too."

Ed Pugh just laughed a little. But I could see he was mad.

"Don't you worry about me, Dr. Brown," he said, mean. "When I get to be governor—and I got my plans all made—that there hospital you're so proud of ain't gonna operate on state funds no more. A fine thing!"

"Folks laying around in hospitals eating their fool heads off! Make 'em get out and plough, that's what I say. Us Pughs never gets sick. I got lots of better uses for state money than paying folks to lay around in bed when I'm governor."

All the doctor said was, "Where's that ambulance?"

"If you mean that big long car making such a noise," I said, "it's about three miles off but coming fast. Uncle Lem don't need no help, though. He's just having an attack. We get 'em in the family all the time. It don't mean nothing."

"Good heavens!" the doc said, staring down at Uncle Lem. "You mean he's had this before and lived?" Then he looked up at me and smiled all of a sudden. "Oh, I see," he said. "Afraid of hospitals, are you? Well, don't worry. We won't hurt him."

That surprised me some. He was a smart man. I'd fibbed a little for just that reason. Hospitals is no place for Hogbens. People in hospitals are too danged nosy. So I called Uncle Lem real loud, inside my head.

"Uncle Lem," I hollered, only thinking it, not out loud. "Uncle Lem, wake up quick! Grandpaw'll nail your hide to the barn door if'n you let yourself get took to a hospital. You want 'em to find out about them two hearts you got in your chest? And the way your bones are fixed and the shape of your gizzard? Uncle Lem! Wake up!"

It wasn't no manner of use. He never even twitched.

Right then I began to get really scared. Uncle Lem had sure landed me in the soup. There I was with all that responsibility on my shoulders and I didn't have the least idea how to handle it. I'm just a young feller after all. I can hardly remember much farther back than the great fire of London, when Charles II was king, with all them long curls a-harging on his shoulders. On him, though, they looked good.

"Mister Pugh," I said, "you've got to call off Junior. I can't let Uncle Lem get took to the hospital. You know I can't."

"Junior, pour it on," Mister Pugh said, grinning real nasty. "I want a little talk with young Hogben here." The doctor looked up, puzzled, and Ed Pugh said, "Step over here a mite, Hogben. I want a private word with you. Junior, bear down!"

Uncle Lem's yellow and blue spots got green rings around their outside edges. The doctor sorta gasped and Ed Pugh took my arm and pulled me back. When we was out of earshot he said to me, confidential, fixing me with his tiny little eyes:

"I reckon you know what I want, Hogben. Lem never did say he *couldn't*, he only said he wouldn't, so I know you folks can do it for me."

"Just exactly what is it you want, Mister Pugh?" I asked him.

"You know. I want to make sure our fine old family line goes on. I want there should always be Pughs. I had so much trouble getting married off myself and I know Junior ain't going to be easy to wife. Women don't have no taste nowadays."

"Since Lilly Lou went to glory there hasn't been a woman on earth ugly enough to marry a Pugh and I'm skeered Junior'll be the last of a great line. With his talent I can't bear the thought. You just fix it so our family won't never die out and I'll have Junior take the hex off Lemuel."

"If I fixed it so your line didn't die out," I said, "I'd be fixing it so everybody else's line *would* die out, just as soon as there was enough Pughs around."

"What's wrong with that?" Ed Pugh asked, grinning. "Way I see it we're good strong stock." He flexed his gorilla arms. He was taller than me, even. "No harm in populatin' the world with good stock, is there? I figger given time enough us Pughs could conquer the whole danged world. And you're gonna help us do it, young Hogben."

"Oh, no," I said. "Oh, no! Even if I knowed how—"

There was a turrible noise at the end of the street and the crowd scattered to make way for the ambulance, which drew up at the curb beside Uncle Lem. A couple of fellers in white coats

jumped out with a sort of pallet on sticks. Dr. Brown stood up, looking real relieved.

"Thought you'd never get here," he said. "This man's a quarantine case, I think. Heaven knows what kind of results we'll find when we start running tests on him. Hand me my bag out of the back there, will you? I want my stethoscope. There's something funny about this man's heart."

WELL, my heart sunk right down into my boots. We was goners and I knowed it—the whole Hogben tribe. Once them doctors and scientists find out about us we'll never know a moment's peace again as long as we live. We won't have no more privacy than a corncob.

Ed Pugh was watching me with a nasty grin on his pasty face.

"Worried, huh?" he said. "You gotta right to be worried. I know about you Hogbens. All witches. Once they get Lem in the hospital, no telling what they'll find out. Against the law to be witches, probably. You've got about half a minute to make up your mind, young Hogben. What do you say?"

Well, what could I say? I couldn't give him a promise like he was asking, could I? Not and let the whole world be overrun by hexing Pughs. Us Hogbens live a long time. We've got some pretty important plans for the future when the rest of the world begins to catch up with us. But if by that time the rest of the world is all Pughs, it won't hardly seem worth while, somehow. I couldn't say yes.

But if I said no Uncle Lem was a goners. Us Hogbens was doomed either way, it seemed to me.

Looked like there was only one thing to do. I took a deep breath, shut my eyes, and let out a desperate yell inside my head.

"Grandpaw!" I hollered.

"Yes, my boy?" said a big deep voice in the middle of my brain. You'd a-thought he'd been right alongside me all the time, just waiting to be called. He was a hundred-odd miles off, and sound asleep. But when a Hogben calls in the tone of voice I called in he's got a right to expect an answer—quick. I got it.

Mostly Grandpaw woulda dithered around for fifteen minutes, asking cross questions and not listening to the an-

swers, and talking in all kinds of queer old-fashioned dialects, like Sanskrit, he's picked up through the years. But this time he seen it was serious.

"Yes, my boy?" was all he said.

I flapped my mind wide open like a school-book in front of him. There wasn't no time for questions and answers. The doc was getting out his dingsus to listen to Uncle Lem's two hearts beating out of tune and once he heard that the jig would be up for us Hogbens.

"Unless you let me kill 'em, Grandpaw," I added. Because by that time I knowed he'd read the whole situation from start to finish in one fast glance.

It seemed to me he was quiet an awful long time after that. The doc had got the dingsus out and he was fitting its little black arms into his ears. Ed Pugh was watching me like a hawk. Junior stood there all swole up with pizon, blinking his mean little eyes around for somebody to shoot it at. I was half hoping he'd pick on me. I'd worked out a way to make it bounce back in his face and there was a chance it might even kill him.

I heard Grandpaw give a sorta sigh in my mind.

"They've got us over a barrel, Saunk," he said. I remember being a little surprised he could speak right plain English when he wanted to. "Tell Pugh we'll do it."

"But Grandpaw—" I said.

"Do as I say!" It gave me a headache, he spoke so firm. "Quick, Saunk! Tell Pugh we'll give him what he wants."

Well, I didn't dare disobey. But this once I really came close to defying Grandpaw.

It stands to reason even a Hogben has got to get senile someday, and I thought maybe old age had finally set in with Grandpaw at last.

What I thunk at him was, "All right, if you say so, but I sure hate to do it. Seems like if they've got us going and coming, the least we can do is take our medicine like Hogbens and keep all that pizon bottled up in Junior stead of spreading it around the world." But out loud I spoke to Mister Pugh.

"All right, Mister Pugh," I said, real humble. "You win. Only, call off your hex. Quick, before it's too late."

CHAPTER IV

Pughs A-Coming

MISTER PUGH had a great big yellow automobile, low-slung, without no top. It went awful fast. And it was sure awful noisy. Once I'm pretty sure we run over a small boy in the road but Mister Pugh paid him no mind and I didn't dare say nothing. Like Grandpaw said, the Pughs had us over a barrel.

It took quite a lot of palaver before I convinced 'em they'd have to come back to the homestead with me. That was part of Grandpaw's orders.

"How do I know you won't murder us in cold blood once you get us out there in the wilderness?" Mister Pugh asked.

"I could kill you right here if I wanted," I told him. "I would too but Grandpaw says no. You're safe if Grandpaw says so, Mister Pugh. The word of a Hogben ain't never been broken yet."

So he agreed, mostly because I said we couldn't work the necessary spells except on home territory. We loaded Uncle Lem into the back of the car and took off for the hills. Had quite an argument with the doc, of course. Uncle Lem sure was stubborn.

He wouldn't wake up nobody but once Junior took the hex off Uncle Lem faded out fast to a good healthy color again. The doc just didn't believe it coulda happened, even when he saw it. Mister Pugh had to threaten quite a lot before we got away. We left the doc sitting on the curb, muttering to himself and rubbing his haid dazedlike.

I could feel Grandpaw a-studying the Pughs through my mind all the way home. He seemed to be sighing and kinda shaking his haid—such as it is—and working out problems that didn't make no manner of sense to me.

When we drewed up in front of the house there wasn't a soul in sight. I could hear Grandpaw stirring and muttering on his gunnysack in the attic but Paw seemed to have went invisible and he was too drunk to tell me where he was when I asked. The baby was asleep. Maw was still at the church sociable and Grandpaw said to leave her be.

"We can work this out together,

Saunk," he said as soon as I got outa the car. "I've been thinking. You know that sled you fixed up to sour your Maw's cream this morning? Drag it out, son. Drag it out."

I seen in a flash what he had in mind. "Oh, no, Grandpaw!" I said, right out loud.

"Who you talking to?" Ed Pugh asked, lumbering down outa the car. "I don't see nobody. This your homestead? Ratty old dump, ain't it? Stay close to me, Junior. I don't trust these folks any farther'n I can see 'em."

"Get the sled, Saunk," Grandpaw said, very firm. "I got it all worked out. We're gonna send these two gorillas right back through time, to a place they'll really fit."

"But Grandpaw!" I hollered, only inside my head this time. "Let's talk this over. Lemme get Maw in on it anyhow. Paw's right smart when he's sober. Why not wait till he wakes up? I think we oughta get the Baby in on it too. I don't think sending 'em back through time's a good idea at all, Grandpaw."

"The Baby's asleep," Grandpaw said. "You leave him be. He read himself to sleep over his Einstein, bless his little soul."

I think the thing that worried me most was the way Grandpaw was talking plain English. He never does when he's feeling normal. I thought maybe his old age had all caught up with him at one bank, and knocked all the sense outa his—so to speak—haid.

"Grandpaw," I said, trying to keep calm. "Don't you see? If we send 'em back through time and give 'em what we promised it'll make everything a million times worse than before. You gonna strand 'em back there in the year one and break your promise to 'em?"

"Saunk!" Grandpaw said.

"I know. If we promised we'd make sure the Pugh line won't die out, then we gotta make sure. But if we send 'em back to the year one that'll mean all the time between then and now they'll spend spreading out and spreading out. More Pughs every generation."

"Grandpaw, five seconds after they hit the year one, I'm liable to feel my two eyes rush together in my haid and my face go all fat and pasty like Junior. Grandpaw, everybody in the world may be Pughs if we give 'em

that much time to spread out in!"

"Cease thy chirring, thou chilc dolt," Grandpaw hollered. "Do my bidding, young fool!"

That made me feel a little better but not much. I went and dragged out the sled. Mister Pugh put up quite a argument about that.

"I ain't rid on a sled since I was so high," he said. "Why should I git on one now? This is some trick. I won't do it."

Junior tried to bite me.

"Now Mister Pugh," I said, "you gotta cooperate or we won't get nowhere. I know what I'm doing. Just step up here and set down. Junior, there's room for you in front. That's fine."

IF he hadn't seen how worried I was I don't think he'd a-done it. But I couldn't hide how I was feeling.

"Where's your Grandpaw?" he asked, uneasy. "You're not going to do this whole trick yourself, are you? Young ignorant feller like you? I don't like it. Suppose you made a mistake?"

"We give our word," I reminded him. "Now just kindly shut up and let me concentrate. Or maybe you don't want the Pugh line to last forever?"

"That was the promise," he says, settling himself down. "You gotta do it. Lemme know when you commence."

"All right, Saunk," Grandpaw says from the attic, right brisk. "Now you watch. Maybe you'll learn a thing or two. Look sharp. Focus your eyes down and pick out a gene. Any gene."

Bad as I felt about the whole thing I couldn't help being interested. When Grandpaw does a thing he does it up brown. Genes are mighty slippery little critters, spindle-shaped and awful teensy. They're partners with some skinny guys called chromosomes, and the two of 'em show up everywhere you look, once you've got your eyes focused just right.

"A good dose of ultraviolet ought to do the trick," Grandpaw muttered. "Saunk, you're closer."

I said, "All right, Grandpaw," and sort of twiddled the light as it sifted down through the pines above the Pughs. Ultraviolet's the color at the other end of the line, where the colors stop having names for most people.

Grandpaw said, "Thanks, son. Hold it for a minute."

The genes began to twiddle right in time with the light-waves, Junior said, "Paw, something's tickling me."

Ed Pugh said, "Shut up."

Grandpaw was muttering to himself. I'm pretty sure he stole the words from that perferer we keep in the bottle, but you can't tell, with Grandpaw. Maybe he was the first person to make 'em up in the beginning.

"The euchromatin," he kept muttering. "That ought to fix it. Ultraviolet gives us hereditary mutation and the euchromatin contains the genes that transmit heredity. Now that other stuff's heterochromatin and *that* produces evolutionary change of the cataclysmic variety.

"Very good, very good. We can always use a new species. Hum-m-m. About six bursts of heterochromatinic activity ought to do it." He was quiet for a minute. Then he said, "Ish am eldre and ek magti! Okay, Saunk, take it away."

I LET the ultraviolet go back where it came from.

"The year one, Grandpaw?" I asked, very doubtful.

"That's close enough," he said. "Wite thou the way?"

"Oh yes, Grandpaw," I said. And I bent over and give them the necessary push.

The last thing I heard was Mister Pugh's howl.

"What's that you're doin'?" he hollered at me. "What's the idee? Look out, there, young Hogben or—what's this? What's this? Where we goin'?" Young Saunk, I warn you, if this is some trick I'll set Junior on you! I'll send you such a hex as even you-u. . ."

Then the howl got real thin and small and far away until it wasn't no more than the noise a mosquito makes. After that it was mighty quiet in the doorway.

I stood there all braced, ready to stop myself from turning into a Pugh if I could. Them little genes is tricky fellers.

I knowed Grandpaw had made a turrrible mistake.

The minute them Pughs hit the year one and started to bounce back through time toward now I knowed what would happen.

I ain't sure how long ago the year

one was, but there was plenty of time for the Pughs to populate the whole planet. I put two fingers against my nose to keep my eyes from banging each other when they started to rush together in the middle like all us Pughs' eyes do—

"You ain't a Pugh yet, son," Grandpaw said, chuckling. "Kin ye see 'em?"

"No," I said. "What's happening?"

"The sled's starting to slow down," he said. "Now it's stopped. Yep, it's the year one, all right. Look at all them men and women flockin' outa the caves to greet their new company! My, my, what great big shoulders the men have got. Bigger even than Paw Pugh's.

"An' ugh—just look at the women! I declare, little Junior's positively handsome alongside them folks! He won't have no trouble finding a wife when the time comes."

"But Grandpaw, that's turrrible!" I said.

"Don't sass your elders, Saunk," Grandpaw chuckled. "Looka there now. Junior's just pulled a hex. Another little child fell over flat on his ugly face. Now the little child's mother is knocking Junior endwise. Now his pappy's sailing into Paw Pugh. Look at that fight! Just look at it! Oh, I guess the Pugh family's well took care of, Saunk."

"But what about our family?" I said, almost wailing.

"Don't you worry," Grandpaw said. "Time'll take care of that. Wait a minute, let me watch. Hm-m. A generation don't take long when you know how to look. My, my, what ugly little critters the ten baby Pughs was! They was just like their pappy and their grandpappy.

"I wish Lily Lou Mutz could see her grandbabies, I shorely do. Well, now, ain't that cute? Every one of them babies grewed up in a flash, seems like, and each of 'em has got ten babies of their own. I like to see my promises working out, Saunk. I said I'd do this, and I done it."

I just moaned.

"All right," Grandpaw said. "Let's jump ahead a couple of centuries. Yep, still there and spreading like crazy. Family likeness is still strong, too. Hum-m. Another thousand years and—well, I declare! If it ain't Ancient Greece! Hasn't changed a bit, neither.

What do you know, Saunk!" He cackled right out, tickled pink.

"Remember what I said once about Lily Lou putting me in mind of an old friend of mine named Gorgon? No wonder! Perfectly natural. You ought to see Lily Lou's great-great-great-grandbabies! No, on second thought, it's lucky you can't. Well, well, this is shore interesting."

HE was still about three minutes. Then I heard him laugh.

"Bang," he said. "First heterochromatic burst. Now the changes start."

"What changes, Grandpaw?" I asked, feeling pretty miserable.

"The changes," he said, "that show your old Grandpaw ain't such a fool as you thought. I know what I'm doing. They go fast, once they start. Look there now, that's the second change. Look at them little genes mutate!"

"You mean," I said, "I ain't gonna turn into a Pugh after all? But Grandpaw, I thought we'd promised the Pughs their line wouldn't die out."

"I'm keeping my promise," Grandpaw said, dignified. "The genes will carry the Pugh likeness right on to the toot of the judgment horn, just like I said. And the hex power goes right along with it."

Then he laughed.

"You better brace yourself, Saunk," he said. "When Paw Pugh went sailing off into the year one seems like he uttered a hex threat, didn't he? Well, he wasn't fooling. It's a-coming at you right now."

"Oh, Lordy!" I said. "There'll be a million of 'em by the time they get here! Grandpaw! What'll I do?"

"Just brace yourself," Grandpaw said, real unsympathetic. "A million, you think? Oh, no, lots more than a million."

"How many?" I asked him.

He started in to tell me. You may not believe it but he's *still* telling me. It takes that long. There's that many of 'em.

You see, it was like with that there Jukes family that lived down south of here. The bad ones was always a mite worse than their children and the same dang thing happened to Gene Chromosome and his kin, so to speak. The Pughs stayed Pughs and they kept the hex power—and I guess you might say

the Pughs conquered the whole world, after all.

But it could of been worse. The Pughs could of stayed the same size down through the generations. Instead they got smaller—a whole lot smaller. When I knowed 'em they was bigger than most folks—Paw Pugh, anyhow.

But by the time they'd done filtering the generations from the year one, they'd shrunk so much them little pale fellers in the blood was about their size. And many a knock-down drag-out fight they have with 'em, too.

Them Pugh genes took such a beating from the heterochromatic bursts Grandpaw told me about that they got whopped all outa their proper form. You might call 'em a virus now—and of course a virus is exactly the same thing as a gene, except the virus is friskier. But heavens above, that's like saying the Jukes boys is exactly the same as George Washington!

The hex hit me—hard.

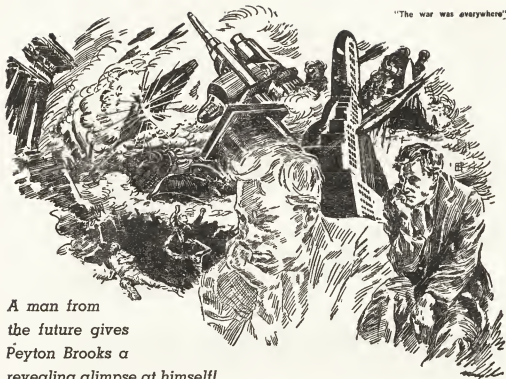
I sneezed something turrible. Then I heard Uncle Lem sneezing in his sleep, lying back there in the yellor car. Grandpaw was still droning on about how many Pughs was a-coming at me right that minute, so there wasn't no use asking questions. I fixed my eyes different and looked right down into the middle of that sneeze to see what had tickled me—

WELL, you never seen so many Junior Pughs in all your born days! It was the hex, all right. Likewise, them Pughs is still busy, hexing everybody on earth, off and on. They'll do it for quite a time, too, since the Pugh line has got to go on forever, account of Grandpaw's promise.

They tell me even the microscopes ain't never yet got a good look at certain viruses. The scientists are sure in for a surprise someday when they focus down real close and see all them pasty-faced little devils, ugly as sin, with their eyes set real close together, wiggling around hexing everybody in sight.

It took a long time—since the year one, that is—but Gene Chromosome fixed it up, with Grandpaw's help. So Junior Jugh ain't a pain in the neck no more, so to speak.

But I got to admit he's an awful cold in the haid.



*A man from
the future gives
Peyton Brooks a
revealing glimpse at himself!*

....backward, O Time!

I'D JUST come from my last June exam, and was sweating out pass or fail; so when this private detective asked me nicely, I went with him to see his client. Leaving the prefabricated hutch in Veteranville where I lived with two other G. I. seniors, we crossed the campus to University Inn and went upstairs to the farthest room on the second floor. He knocked, and a voice said, "Come in," and we came in.

"Got him, sir," the private detective told the man sitting beside the bed. "Here's Mr. Peyton Brooks, anxious to hear what you'll tell him to his advantage."

As the man got up I felt embarrassed, because I knew him from somewhere and couldn't fix where. He was tall—my height. Maybe he'd been my build once, but he had lived thirty years longer than I had, and had

thinned down. From his strained, tired look I reckoned he hadn't slept well lately, maybe hadn't eaten well. His hair was so gray it looked almost powder blue, and his eyes were big and bright, as if a cartoonist had drawn them in extra. Maybe the nose was familiar because it had been broken and set a little crooked, like mine. He had bracket lines at his mouth corners, like mine. I decided that maybe these were the things that bothered my memory.

His big bright eyes raked me up and down.

"Come in, son," he invited, in a soft, trembling voice. To the private detective he said: "Take what I owe you out of this, and keep the rest."

He brought a wallet from inside his checked sport coat. That coat was cut extra

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

snappy, more young-man than old-man, and it fitted him looser than I like. He gave a bill to the detective, who turned it over and stared at it.

"Something wrong?" asked the blue-gray man with the bright eyes.

"No, sir." The detective put the bill in his own wallet. "I just don't see many hundred-dollar patches these hard times. Thank you, sir. Good-by." The detective went out and shut the door.

"Now," said the man to me, "sit down, son." His voice trembled again. "What I'm going to tell you needs us to have a drink with it."

On the bureau was a room service tray, with a bottle of Dubonnet and another of soda, a saucerful of shredded lemon peel, and two glasses stacked full of ice cubes. He poured the glasses half full of Dubonnet, filled them the rest of the way with soda, and twisted bits of peel into them.

"Did your detective tell you that was my favorite drink?" I asked.

"No, he didn't," replied the man. "It happens to be my favorite drink, too." He gave me one glass and lifted the other, and we both drank.

WE SAT down opposite each other. I looked him over curiously.

"What can I do for you?" I asked. "Sorry if I act jumpy. I just took my last exam for my engineering degree. My chances of passing look pretty glum."

"You'll pass your examinations," he said, just as if he really had it to promise. "You'll graduate with fair marks, and get that job you applied for with the Kemp offices. But," he went on, "you won't like the job. You'll keep thinking about sophomore physics and chemistry, and the possibilities in atomic research and what may grow out of it, until finally—"

"What's all this about?" I interrupted, and leaned forward, so suddenly and so far that I spilled some of my drink.

He closed the big bright eyes, and the lids looked strained, as if the eyes were too big to crowd in under them easily. "Maybe I'm going at things wrong," he said, gently and wearily. "Maybe I don't go at them right."

"You already know my name," I reminded him. "Peyton Brooks. What's yours?"

He shook his blue-gray head. "That would be another wrong start. Give me a minute. Believe me, I'm acting this way because I must."

I wondered why he seemed familiar, and why his strange manner didn't make me angry, and if he were a long-lost relative or something like that. I tried being funny.

"You talk like a fortune-teller," I said. "Okay, go ahead. Who am I going to marry?"

"You haven't met her yet," he said gravely. "Her name's Mildred Stevens."

"I certainly haven't met her yet," I told him. I thought for a second about Joyce Donelson.

"You think," he continued, "that you're going to marry Joyce Donelson, but you aren't."

"Now wait," I protested, feeling scrambled and hot. "I've never even asked her—"

"You've been saving that for when you graduated and have got your job," he interrupted. "Then you'll ask her. She'll say yes, but in about two weeks you'll find out you're sick of each other. Then," and his voice went downright dreamy, "you'll meet the office manager at Kemp's and visit his home. His name is Harry Stevens. His sister's name is Mildred. Just wait until you see her, son. She's the girl you're going to marry."

I jumped up, scowling down at him, wishing he was young enough to slap in the face. I put my glass on the bureau.

"Good-by, mister," I said.

"I might have known you'd think I was rude," he said, and put his elbow on his knee and his chin on his hand. He was white around the mouth. I didn't leave. Suddenly I felt a funny sympathy, from somewhere I couldn't identify.

"Let me make another new start," he pleaded gently. "Give me the chance. After all, I'm older than you are. I've been through a lot more."

"You're older than I am," I agreed, easing down a notch, "but maybe I've been two or three places you haven't. The war, for instance."

"I was in the war," he said dully.

"I mean World War Two. Combat service."

"I was in World War Two, and in combat service. I saw exactly as much combat service as you did." He gestured. "Please have another drink."

"Well," I said, and found myself sitting down again. He rose and mixed fresh drinks. Then he took a dressing case from the top bureau drawer.

"Pardon me while I freshen up my eyes," he said, and stepped into the bathroom.

Through the open door I saw him dig at his eyes and unship one, then the other, of a pair of contact lenses. He got out a drug-gist's bottle and sluiced them down with colorless liquid, shook off the surplus drops, then pried his lids apart and slid the lenses back into place. That was why his eyes looked so big and bright.

"Are those things any good?" I asked as he returned. "Compared to ordinary spectacles, I mean."

"Quite a lot better, son," he said. "I've used them for twenty years."

I FROWNED. I didn't think contact lenses were made that long ago. He smiled into his drink, wanting to be friends with me.

"Now I'll ask a question," he attempted. "Would you really like to know about your future?"

"Not these days," I replied. "I'm scared to hear it. We're living in the last days of the world."

His bright lenses studied me. "Lots of people feel like that, don't they?"

"We got shooting the breeze between classes," I said. "We keep making guesses how soon we'll be back in the service, wondering if the next atom bomb or bacteria capsule has our name on it. Since you know all about my exams and my future wife—what did you call her?"

"Mildred Stevens." His voice fairly cuddled the name.

"Well, you ought to know about the next war, too. Who'll be in it, and when's it going to be, and which side will win."

"Yes, I know." He looked pale and sick again. "Everybody will be in it, within about ten years, and no side will win."

Then I relaxed. Practically everybody was saying that. I felt on familiar ground. "You're pretty sure of this."

"Not exactly. Because, you see, someone who—" He paused. "Someone who could predict it, he might—Well, he could try, at least, to keep it from happening."

I tried to kid him.

"You're predicting it. Why don't you keep it from happening? Or is that why you called me up here?"

"That's just why I called you up here, son. Let me hit it from another angle. You were pretty young in Nineteen Twenty-Six."

"Three years old," I supplied.

"But you've studied world history as it happened since then. At least as well as anyone studies history while it's happening.

What was going on in Nineteen Twenty-Six?"

I rocked my glass to mix the wine and the water. "Coolidge was President," I said. "We had Prohibition. Dad still grumbles when he thinks about it. Nobody worried much about anything except where the next drink was coming from. We've outgrown that, at least. We worry plenty now. We had lots of fast automobiles, but the aviation industry was waiting for Lindbergh to show up and fly across the ocean."

"That was America, but what about other countries?" he half heckled me. "How about Hitler and Mussolini?"

"Mussolini was shaping up as the dictator of Italy, but Hitler was a crumbum in Munich or somewhere; not even heard of."

"What if you could switch back to then, knowing what you know now?" he asked me eagerly. "Able to tell everybody about the depression and World War Two."

I laughed. "That's an easy one. Nobody would believe me. I'd mention Hitler and his name wouldn't register, except maybe to a handful of crackpots just beginning to oil up to him in Germany. Mussolini—they'd tell me that he was okay, he was making the Italian trains run on time. If I said Franklin D. Roosevelt would be President in 'Thirty-Two, he'd only figure as a young New Yorker who'd lost out running for Vice-President in Nineteen Twenty and then was out of things because he was crippled. About all I could do with my knowledge would be to play the stock market and sell short in October of 'Twenty-Nine."

"Does that appeal to you?" he demanded at once. "Speculation? This year—let's see. Cotton will be the buy, but when the big operators get it up to forty-five, you must sell out and let them lose their shirts when it breaks before reaching fifty." He reached inside the checked coat. "You have only your Government check, but suppose I advance you—"

"Maybe I'm only about half your age, and short on predicting the future," I broke in, making myself sound as mean as I could, "but I know enough not to take loans from people I don't even know by name."

He let his hand drop into his lap. "You're right, son. I shouldn't have offered it. Well, let's get back to who'll be elected President in 'Fifty-Two."

YET I was still feeling touchy about what he had said.

"I doubt if the only man I'd vote for will

be running," I said to snub him. "What are the rest of those questions of yours? What's with all this going back twenty-odd years, where nobody would believe anything I told them? Are you offering me a return ticket to Coolidge's administration? That's strictly for the science fiction magazines, mister."

"I'm getting you used to the idea," he said. "Suppose someone came back to this present time from—say, thirty years in the future? You can see how he'd be limited and mistrusted and laughed at."

"I get it," I said. "You're the man from thirty years in the future."

He looked confused and set down his glass. He might have dropped it otherwise, his hand shook so.

"I was trying to build up to where you'd somehow believe that," he mumbled. "Now you won't."

Leaning back, I grinned and shook my head. The little breeze I made with the motion stirred my hair.

"No sale," I said. "I certainly won't believe it. You should have hit me when I was about fourteen, reading about time travel. It was believable to me then. So were ray guns and space ships and serums that turned beautiful blondes into black panthers."

"Right," he agreed, slowly and thoughtfully. "That's right. I should have gone back twelve years deeper, to when you were a boy instead of a hard, bitter ex-soldier."

"Why me especially?" I demanded. "If I'm not falling for your story, why don't you hunt up some kid and get him to believe you, if what you want is to be believed."

"Just remember what you yourself said," he put in. "About going back into the past and not convincing the people then."

"If I did that, I'd take proof along," I said. "Today's newspaper, or a modern table-top radio, or a Garand rifle." I was smiling again. "Sail ahead in time again and bring back the ray throwers and the invisibility drugs and an autographed letter from the emperor of Mars. I'll wait right here for you."

"Let me see," he sighed. "Let me see."

He rummaged in a pocket of his slacks and brought out three or four coins. "Here," he said, and passed them to me.

As soon as I had them, I saw they were white metal, but not ordinary small change. They weren't milled at the edges, and the biggest one had Lincoln's head without the whiskers. I turned it over, and there was a spread-eagle, different from spread-eagles I

knew from my own coins, and printing around the rim.

"It's a five-dollar piece, it says," I said.

"Look at the date."

I turned back to Lincoln's head. "Nineteen Fifty-Six," I read aloud.

"Now the others," the man bade me.

A nickel-sized coin said \$2.50 in the middle of one side, and was dated 1973. The other two were smaller than dimes. One was worn so smooth I couldn't read it. The other was marked \$1, and dated 1972. I handed them back.

"You wouldn't have stamped those out yourself?" I asked.

"Wouldn't that be a little too elaborate a trick?" he asked back, smiling.

I breathed deeply. "Not if you had some game to put over on hundreds of people, not just me. You'll have to let me say things like this. You've given me a hard chunk to swallow, and I'm entitled to gulp and gag."

"You are indeed, son," he sounded kind and patient. "Consider every possibility of fraud. But," and he offered the coins again, "if these were spurious pieces, wouldn't they look new?"

"Lead in counterfeit coins will wear quickly," I reminded.

"But these are silver. Try them."

I TOOK back the five-dollar piece, and from my own pants pocket I fished a silver quarter. I got up and went to the bureau and dropped both coins on top of it. They rang like silver—two different tones and vibrations, but both of them silver.

"I take it," said I, "that up yonder in the future where you come from, a dollar's worth about what a nickel is worth now."

"Just about," and he smiled again. "That's why I could pay that detective so carelessly with a hundred-dollar bill. I brought the oldest paper money I could get back here with me, so it wouldn't be counterfeit in these times."

I dropped the five-dollar piece into his hand. With almost the same motion, I twitched a handkerchief from his jacket pocket.

"Sorry, that's no exhibit," he said. "I bought it this morning, in a haberdashery a block from here."

"Sure, sure," I said, and returned the handkerchief. "I judge you bought that shirt and necktie, too. They don't look futuristic to me."

"Look at my jacket," he invited, and rose and turned slowly around. "Well?"

"It's sharp-looking," I said. "I like the way it's cut, though maybe not quite so loose."

Facing me, he grinned his friendliest. "I bought it in Nineteen Fifty-One. You can get it—or one like it, I mean—then. But have a good look." He slipped out of the jacket and handed it to me. "It was the oldest garment I had up there in the future. I had it cleaned and pressed, and wore it so I wouldn't seem too peculiar in these times."

The material was old. The lining was worn. The colors of the checks might be faded, but I couldn't be sure. I held it for him to put on again.

"Since you're allowing me to have suspicions," I said, "it could have been newly cut and made up out of old cloth."

He walked to the closet. Out of it he pulled a gray shirt and brought it back to me. "Here," he said, "is the shirt I changed out of before you came up."

It was lighter in my hands than so much spider webbing. When I pinched up a fold of the goods, it was like feeling a film of strong plastic. I stretched it, and it stretched, but it didn't strain, and I could see no weave pattern. I turned it over and over. It was made something like a pullover jersey, with no buttons or fasteners, and cuffs and a turndown collar like snug bands. I wadded it up, and it could be hidden inside my two hands cupped together. I let go, and it flopped out again with no creases or rumples.

"What kind of material is it?" I asked.

"It's called silk-metal," he replied, "or it will be called silk-metal. Let's see if you're man enough to tear off a piece."

I tried, but I wasn't man enough, or anywhere near it.

"It'll shed water, too, but it doesn't seal out air," he went on. "That's what clothes are made of in the late Nineteen Seventies."

I handed him the shirt. "That's your selling point," I said. "You might convince some people with that shirt. At least, you'd make a fortune by manufacturing the fabric."

"Fortune!" he snapped. "When dollars will shrivel down to nickels? What use is money when you can't buy anything with it? When war isn't even hiding just around the corner, but in full view and bearing down, all set to last year after year and ruin the world and everything in it?"

"A world-ruining war," I said. "Thirty years of it—sounds like ancient history."

"Well, twenty years of war that I can swear to, and it's future history. About the

last page. Cities—there won't be any cities left. Not even the underground ones. The first few weeks are the worst, then the targets begin to go out of existence, and the power on both sides weakens down. It gets to be like a fight where two sluggers absorb each other's heaviest punches and get fainter and fainter, staggering around each other and pawing and poking; and neither of them going down because neither one has a knockout blow left—just wearing away, wearing away, and no third party present to ring the bell on them and call it a draw while they're still alive to recover from it!"

HIS voice had risen sharp and shrill. Then he shut it off and turned toward the bureau. He poured straight Dubonnet on top of the little washed-down nubbins of ice in his glass, and swigged it off.

"H. G. Wells wrote a story like that once," I said, trying to calm him down.

"I remember. He was absolutely right." His hands trembled as he filled his glass again. "I've wondered if H. G. Wells didn't make a jump into the future himself."

"Somebody might have come back out of the future and had a cozy little chat with him, like this one." I was still clowning, but not very neatly.

"Maybe I should have hunted him up. He'd have understood." The man looked old now, and shaky, as if he had a bad heart or something like that. Veins stood out on his temples. His lips quivered, then tightened, and his eye-lenses glittered.

"Sit down," I said to him. "Ease off. I want to tell you that I'm out of my idea that you're putting on some kind of an act."

He started. "You believe me?"

"You believe yourself," I said, for I could see that he did. "You're leveling."

We both sat down.

"The survivors endured the later years of the war," he said, his voice steady once more. "They did, because they had to. They couldn't get away. The war was everywhere. You couldn't hide any place, even if transportation hadn't been shot away. The only escape was through time. And a few men found out how, and arranged it. I drew the straw and was used in the experiment."

He paused and took a breath. "I'm stumbling over all the things I have to tell. In a minute I'll lose you again. Let's talk about time. There's lots of it, one new moment following another. And a man exists in it as it goes along. It's the fourth dimension, you know. You've read your Einstein."

"I've read the books that claim to explain him," I answered, trying to be calm. "What you mean is we string out through time, as if it were space."

"You, for instance," he elaborated, "his bright lenses on me. "Six feet tall, eighteen or nineteen inches wide, eight or nine inches thick, and twenty-six years old."

I followed him. "And I make a sort of snaky figure through time," I said. "Clear back to when I was born, a baby weighing eight pounds. When I was fourteen, say, reading stories that sounded like what we're saying now, I was a cross-section of my time snake. Five or six years ago I was another cross-section, fighting in the war. Now I'm another cross-section. But all of me is twenty-six inches deep back through the past."

"And I'm fifty-six years deep," he said, "but I've whipped back to here, to the time when I was your age. I've short-circuited my snake figure in time. Do you comprehend that, and do you wonder that it's hard for me to explain?"

"Well, do you wonder that I take a long time absorbing it?" I said for my own part. "But if you've come back, wouldn't that change the future? Like the Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, or something like him?"

"But there can be different futures," he said. "If you marry Joyce Donelson, you make one future. If you marry Mildred Stevens, you make another. Your child by one wife might turn out the greatest President in history; your child by the other might be the worst international criminal. What if Washington's father had stayed a bachelor? What if young Abraham Lincoln had died of the fever instead of his mother? Do you see something of what I mean?"

"But you're talking of changes in futures that haven't happened yet. When the future becomes past, it can't be changed."

"Can't it?" he said. "Wouldn't it be the same as taking a different road from the one you took before? Wouldn't it have to be the same?" He caught my wrist in his hand. "You're going to believe me," he insisted, "and then we'll go together to someone who counts, and make him believe and help us do something about it."

FOR fully six seconds I was swallowed up in his idea. It took a real effort to make myself get back to logic.

"What you claim," I summed up, "is that you lived into the years ahead, and that

when the world was nearly finished by a long war, some of your fellow-scientists sent you back through the past to this time."

"I can see how bewilderingly impossible it sounds," he said. "But that's my claim."

"You don't even consider the most impossible point of all," I said.

He looked at me through those bright lenses. "What are you going to say, son?"

"You lived through this present time and went ahead of it for thirty years. You've bounded back here as a middle-aged man. But now, right now, you were—or you are—already alive in this present time." I pointed my finger at him. "You're a young man somewhere else. A young man about my age. Let me ask you, what will happen if and when you come face to face with yourself? With the young man you once were, and who is going to be you?"

He got up and walked across the floor.

"My boy," he said, "that's what's happening now."

"Good grief!" I said.

"Look at me," he said. "Look well. You know who I am. Look at our dented noses," he was telling me. "The same. Look at all of me. Here, look."

He came toward me, his hands out, with the palms up and the fingers spread. I had to fight myself to keep from running out of the room and away. It was like a nightmare, with something awful closing in.

"Show me your hands," he said. "You know about fingerprints. They're unique. Nobody has fingerprints that match the fingerprints of anyone else on earth. But the ones you have will stay the same as long as you live."

"Yes," I said. "Yes."

I put my hands beside his. We bent and looked at our fingertips. First the middle fingers of our right hands, close together, and I blinked my eyes to be sure they were clear.

I saw that the little whirls and eddies of fine lines in my flesh were the same, on those two right middle fingertips.

"The thumbs," he said.

We looked, and the thumbs were the same. We looked at the other fingers, and they matched. All of them.

I sat down on the edge of the bed. He put his hand on my shoulder. "My son," he said, "where else could I turn?"

"Nowhere else," I replied. "You came to the right man. Finish your story."

"I will, every bit," he promised. "After that, we'll consider what to do next."

"Good grief!" I said again.



Suddenly the upper atmosphere of Planet Six began to glow in pulsing sheets

The Planet Makers

By L. RON HUBBARD

DOYLE shook an outraged finger under the engineer's nose. "McGee, do I have to remind you that this entire job is to be finished in the next thirty days and you have barely started in four months?"

"Sleepy" McGee sat where he was, heels cocked up on an explosives box, his soles toward the construction hut stove. He had a visograph planted on another box with

a cleared space before it, and in his hands he held a pack of cards. Sleepy McGee, of Planetary Engineering Construction Co., Inc., almost never got excited. He did not get excited now.

"My contract," cried Doyle, "calls for a bonus of a million dollars to your company for every day short of the promised time! But let me remind you that a penalty of one million dollars is to be paid to me for every

Sleepy McGee wasn't so hot as a poker player—but he had an ace in the hole for building new spheres!

day this job exceeds the specified time. Unless you quit this—this idle, supine—”

Doyle was fat. He was easily excited. His color was red and his cheeks were bellowing in and out.

“Mr. Doyle,” said Sleepy, “have a drink.”

Doyle's blood pressure would have broken a gauge. He turned and slammed into the air lock and was gone out into the methane-ammonia atmosphere of Alpha Jetabo's Planet Six.

Sleepy dealt the cards. He dealt them in such a way that they were visible to the visograph, all except his hole card, for this was stud poker. There is nothing peculiar in the playing of stud poker, but this game was with Mart Loneygan who happened to be on an engineering job of his own ninety-three light years away. They had not seen each other for five years, face to face, but Mart owed Sleepy McGee nineteen thousand odd dollars to date.

Mart grinned on the visograph. “Was that Colonial Enterprises?”

“Yep,” said Sleepy. “What you bet?”

“One white. Hold up my hole card again and don't look at it, you pirate or I'll—Make that two whites.”

Sleepy called and dealt the next cards.

“You're no closer than he says?” said

Mart.

“Nope.”

“Whew. That's a big planet, too.”

“Ten thousand kilometers diameter,” said Sleepy. “Your queen bets.”

BARTEBER, the huge black cook, stirred stew over the camp range and stole an occasional peek when Sleepy raised his hole card. Barteber had been with Sleepy for nine years, one planet or another.

Mart Loneygan never found out that Barteber's silent whistles of surprise or glum looks—which Mart could see beyond Sleepy—meant absolutely nothing and were in reality a solid part of Sleepy's poker. Barteber would have given his right arm before he would have cost Sleepy a pot by betrayal, but Mart, being a trusting soul, did not know that.

Sleepy yawned. He was about six feet six and he had little weight to go with it, no matter his huge appetite. He drew fifty thousand dollars a year as a field engineer for Planetary Construction, Inc. and he dressed something worse than any one of his cat men. It was said of him in certain unsavory places in the universe that he could drink more liquor, play better poker, shoot

with less compunction and yawn wider than any spaceman alive. That was exaggeration. He had met a man on Pilos who could play poker just as good.

The air lock whistled and slammed shut and Tommer Kaltenborn came into the construction shack, tugging off his helmet. Tommer was excited. He was a very young engineer, Tommer. He had come up as junior assistant to Planet Six as a replacement for a man who had carelessly tried to smoke inside his helmet, and Tommer recognized that he was having his chance and recognized, too, that he had ample opportunity to make it good.

No single school practice which Tommer had been taught was being followed on Planet Six. This was upsetting. It made his black hair stand up bristly straight and made his spectacle-rimmed eyes squint with disdain. If Sleepy McGee was an example of Planetary men, Tommer knew that one Kaltenborn would go far, very far.

“Number Eighteen cat's been sabotaged,” said Tommer. “That's the fifth example of tampering since we got here. You've got to come out. The link pins are gone on the right tread. That leaves us just five cats. How we're to smooth down whole mountain ranges with five cats—”

Sleepy didn't have to look up. He knew what Tommer looked like. He knew what the construction hut looked like. He said:

“Hello, Tommer. Glad you came in. This visograph reception is bad. Very bad.” He yawned. “We got any spiderwork steel left?”

“Sir, that cat—”

“How much we got?”

“About ninety kilos.”

Sleepy squinted unseeing at his cards. “Hmmm. Well, run me up a twenty-thousand-foot tower outside here and put an aerial on it. And while you're about it, you might as well put one up on the opposite side of this chunk of mud. Put in a relay.”

“Sir, Number Eighteen cat—”

“Run it in a hole and shovel dirt on it,” said Sleepy. “Tell Maloney I want the towers done by daylight. When Mart deals, I can't tell a spade from a club.”

Tommer glared. Resolutely, he put on his helmet, looked his contempt for a moment, and turned back into the air lock.

Barteber sniggered and Sleepy called the poker hand. Mart was found to be trying to make two jacks look like three.

Reception was really bad now and Sleepy knocked off the game. He got up, poured

himself a neat slug of Old Space Ranger, handed the bottle to Barteber who, truth told, liked vanilla extract better, and got himself into a suit.

"That Mister Tommer, he want your job purty bad," said Barteber.

"He can have it," said Sleepy.

"And that Mister Doyle, he just plain froths. I never hear such a bloodthirsty man. You look out, Mister Sleepy."

"They aren't so dangerous."

"Well, just the same, I got a couple voodoo charms and a wax figger," said Barteber, and made a vicious attack on the stew.

Sleepy went out into the twilight of Alpha Jetabo's Planet Six. The place would be named New Eden when Colonial Enterprises took it over. They had it on lease from the Tronmane Confederacy. Sleepy looked at the distant mountain range, all rock and corners, and sighed. Certainly it was true that they had not made much progress in the four months they had been here. The one valley was about completed, which left a few billion square kilometers untended. It also left water and soil and air.

The planet was smaller than Earth but had a similar gravity. It would be a monoseason job, with an equatorial temperature of about ninety average. Its year was about one and a half 'arths, and outside of the blue character of Jetabo's Alpha would not look too bad when it was finished.

They were burying the cat as ordered and an inertia ship was taking off with a cargo of spider steel to erect the opposite pole tower. Tommer was standing on a pile of new rock looking at a blueprint.

IT WAS a pretty blueprint, being a Mercator with seas and rivers designated by flamboyant names. It was the prospectus blueprint of the Colonial Enterprises advertising division, and while it sold plenty of property it was not a very good guide for engineering.

However, that was nothing to Tommer. The job was contracted to be this way, and this way it would be. A contractor's first duty was to his builder.

Sleepy looked at the blueprint. "Honey-moon Bay," he said pointing. This amused him. "Bide-a-wee Valley. They always get dopey ideas like this, kid. Don't take it so much to heart."

Tommer glared through lenses and helmet, and said, "We haven't even begun to construct these things. If we had been more on the job we would have found the saboteur

and we would still have what equipment we need. A thousand kilos of powder blown up, twenty million feet of cable ruined and now most of our cats out of commission. We'll never finish. This will bankrupt the company!"

"Well, kid," said Sleepy, "if you go on worrying like that you'll get ulcers. And when you have ulcers you can't drink. And when you can't drink you can't stand places like Planet Six, and there goes your career. Come over here and get somebody to drill me some holes."

They had the tower up, well pinned into the native rock, in about two hours. Sleepy looked admiringly up at this giddy spire into the methane clouds.

"I guess that'll do it," he said. "That reception was getting so darned bad that Mart won five pots today. When they get the other one—"

Maloney, straw boss of the dirt gangs, interrupted him. "You mean we been puttin' this thing up just so you could play poker with that crazy Lonegan?"

Sleepy yawned and smiled. "Well, Maloney, when you get as old as I am—"

"I'm five times older than you and you know it! Somebody just hooked every fuse we've got. Unless you can invent one, we ain't got a single detonator in camp. Who the devil is doin' this? By golly, if I get my mitts—"

"Now, now," said Sleepy. "We'll invent something. It'd be two months before we could get a new order of anything up here."

"Two months!" cried Doyle, who had toiled perspiring toward them over the rubble which had been a mountain range. "Two months! I'll have colonists here in thirty days! McGee, I insist we line up these men and interrogate them one by one. There's somebody in this camp who doesn't want this planet completed!"

"You interrogate one by one," said Sleepy, "and they'll quit two by two. These men are loyal. You'll have to find something else. Maybe a methane metabolism goon or a lost race. You let me do the worrying, Doyle."

"But you aren't worrying!" cried Doyle. "I have to think of my company's reputation. Do you have any idea how much money is being tied up here?"

"Well," said Sleepy, considering, "if you figure this planet at a billion arable acres and the acres at two dollars apiece, I got some idea."

"But they're not arable yet!" cried Doyle. And he swept a despairing hand across the

twilight vista. Truly, it was an ugly sight. In the shrinkings and contortings of a new-made world, vast escarpments had been heaved up. In the bluish, ghastly light, the raw, soilless, plantless valleys and mountains were nightmare stuff.

"You'll never finish!" cried Doyle.

Sleepy shrugged. He turned around and went back into the construction shack and threw his helmet down.

Tommer went into the communications dome and sent a long, tell-tale message to Planetary Construction. Doyle, shortly afterward, poured a flood of grief into the ether on his own.

At eight-seventeen there was a loud flash and men poured from their quarters to find that the cable shed was a shambles and not one foot of their remaining cable in usable condition. They poked in the ruins and went to report to Sleepy. But he was snoring in his bunk and Barteber would not let him be disturbed.

IN THE morning, Sleepy McGee shoveled in twenty hot cakes, washed them down with a quart of milk, chased it with a brandy and was ready to face the day.

He found Maloney and Tommer sitting disconsolate on a pile of demolished scenery and pulled them into his wake. He found half a dozen welders and drew them some drawings on a piece of sheet metal and sent them on their business.

"I heard footsteps walking around last night," said Doyle, coming up.

"Footsteps most always do," said Sleepy.

"Are you trying to be nasty?"

Doyle, for all his fat, was a big man. Sleepy looked him over.

"Now that I come to think of it, yes," Sleepy answered finally. "We've been having a lot of hard luck on this job. Some rival of yours, or ours, has slowed us down to a walk. You haven't made things any easier."

"I don't sit around all day and play poker and drink liquor!" Doyle snapped.

"I'm not dumb and I don't have dirty fingernails," said Sleepy.

"Are you being insulting?"

"I never mix words," said Sleepy. "I am being insulting. In a brief, four-letter word—"

Doyle struck at him. It is very difficult to work or fight in a methane-ammonia suit, but the blow staggered Sleepy. He went down on one knee and stayed there, with the eye of every construction man upon him. Languidly he got to his feet.

Suddenly he grabbed Doyle, avoided a second blow, and pitched the Colonial man about ten feet. Doyle hit, and he started to get up, but Sleepy's boot sent him down again. Doyle tried to rise a second time. Sleepy let him get all the way to his feet and then, with a short one to the midriff, knocked him gasping. "I'll get you for this!" Doyle wheezed. "I'll report you!"

"Not on my visograph!"

"I'll—I'll return to your company! This will cost you millions, do you hear?"

And Doyle got up and ran to the Colonial Enterprise ship in the valley. Sleepy watched him go, watched the ship take off, watched the weird glow of the wake after it was gone.

"He'll make a lot of trouble," said Tommer.

"Kid, I was born out of Calamity by Trouble. Any engineer is. Maloney, put a strong seal on Mr. Doyle's hut and don't let anybody disturb it. We wouldn't want to be accused of stealing his clothes."

"He'll be back here in a month," said Tommer. "That ship isn't any freighter. And he may bring in the Space Police for assault." He looked at Sleepy. Brawling—it was uncouth, ungentlemanly.

"Be that as he will," said Sleepy. "Let's go to work."

The mystified welders were putting hulls under the huts and it took them a long time to understand that Sleepy wasn't entirely crazy. Every now and then one of them would come into the construction shack, see Sleepy playing poker, open his mouth to speak, remember Doyle and back out.

They passed two nights of double-shift construction, with guards posted against sabotage, and then Sleepy condescended to come out and inspect what Tommer had been overseeing.

Twelve huts were all on sledges, as though to be dragged away. The men, glad that the work was done, dragged themselves into their bunks and slept. Sleepy sent for the atomic electrician, a driller and a shooter.

They put a few tools into a thousand-mile-an-hour ground-scanner and disappeared in a cloud of country rock, leaving a worried Tommer to sit and twiddle his thumbs and wait for the message he thought would come from Planetary, relieving Sleepy.

For five days Sleepy and the three men were "whereabouts unknown," and then they returned, tired, hungry and dirty, parked the scanner and turned in.

The following morning Sleepy got around about eleven, yawning and stretching and

making jokes with Barteber. Tommer was all disapproval.

"Where did you go?" said Tommer.

"Had to block in the oceans and rivers, didn't we?" said Sleepy, with a wink at Barteber. "Have a drink, kid?"

"I don't drink."

"Well, there's no harm in that, but I always say that a good engineer is a lot better a quart later. Why, you ought to hear some of the things I've planned when I had two quarts! One time I figured out a scheme to build a bridge from Mars to Jupiter and I would have done it too, only the Sun kept getting in the way. You see, it would have razed the metal and nobody could have crossed.

"And then there was the asteroid assembly project," he continued. "I did that on a bottle and a half. You ball up all the asteroids of some busted planet and they catch fission and you've got a sun close to cold planets which revolve around the original sun and lights the—"

"I'm sure it is impractical," said Tommer.

"Mister Kaltenborn, if Mister Sleepy says it will work," said Barteber, "it *will* work. I seen him take—"

But Tommer had left in disgust.

ABOUT one o'clock, Sleepy called the men together and made them take loose tools and equipment into the twelve sledged huts. Then he ordered the men themselves into the huts. At three, he and the atomic electrician took a lonely stand on the "deck" of the construction hut.

Sleepy pulled out a bottle. "Here's how."

"How," said the electrician with a grin.

Sleepy put his boot on a plunger and pressed.

Suddenly the upper atmosphere of Planet Six began to glow in pulsing sheets. The glow spread and brightened until it blotted the daylight. A beating concussion was faintly felt on the ground and Sleepy braced himself against the outer wall. He gravely presented the bottle again.

"Here's how," he said.

The electrician grinned. "How," he said.

They wiped their mouths by scrubbing them into their fur collars. The electrician shoved down on the second plunger.

There was a growing roar and the ground began to shake harder and harder until the mountains reeled and danced under the pounding of the upper flashes.

Suddenly the rain came. It was torrential. A man without a helmet would have drowned

in a moment. The great drops battered at the rocks and rebounded until the entire surface everywhere was a racing glaze of water, water which mirrored the upper flashes. In a few minutes the valley where the cats had worked so long was so full that all was covered from sight. In half an hour the sledges themselves had become boats and were floating.

The water was shocked and beaten by the repeated earthquakes and the ranges of mountains, invisible through the downpour, suddenly displayed themselves by their gigantic flashes. They were exploding into volcanoes.

The twenty-thousand-foot tower, anchored by force rays, shook under the onslaught, bending and quivering but standing just the same.

Sleepy pushed the bottle inside his helmet trap, said "Here's how," and drank once more, handing it to the electrician.

"How!"

And the third plunger went down.

It was time to duck. The sledges were bobbing already. Shortly something else would hit them. Wind. The blow began to scream in earnest about seven, and it kept up ceaselessly for the next three days.

The sledges were protected by the volcanoes to some extent, but they were battered, nevertheless, by a hundred-mile-an-hour storm. What the speed of wind must have been five miles up, no one could calculate. What batterings the hills and mountains took was not subject to mere computation.

Like a million banshees cut loose all at the same time, the hurricane roared on and on. Now and again mountains belched. Again and again new chain reactions went off in the upper atmosphere. And the water rose and rose and the waves surged and beat.

Sleepy played no poker. The visograph was out of operation for the moment. He lay in his bunk and read an erudite treatise called, "Shady Ladies" and sipped his whiskey thoughtfully. Whatever Tommer might be thinking about all this was no concern of one Sleepy McGee's.

About nine o'clock the morning of the tenth day, Barteber shoved a cup of hot coffee into Sleepy's sleeping hand and said, "The rain's stopped."

That woke Sleepy. He went to the leaded glass port where somebody had written the names and addresses of a half a dozen far-away girls and wiped off the chalk smears.

Indeed, the rain had stopped. But the hurricane wind continued.

Sleepy drank his coffee and let the gale blow itself out. At three that afternoon the waters were calm and settling and he stood on the deck of his sledge and waved to men coming out on theirs. All twelve had weathered the elements, being undentable and self-contained, but two had dragged their moorings and were about a mile farther on.

Lifting his helmet gingerly, Sleepy took a sniff at the air. It was good and he removed his helmet. Jetabo's bluish haze was not so blue now, being filtered through a mist, and the aspect of this planet was something to gratify Sleepy's heart.

The water was draining away in huge rivers. The wind, having eroded mightily against every protrusion, had provided enough silt to color the streams brown. There would be bottom land and soil.

THE FOLLOWING morning, Sleepy went off in a scout ship they had dredged up and took a look at the planet. He flew at ninety thousand feet, with tracers taking down all necessary data of coast lines, prominent rivers and mountains.

The geology had changed enormously, due to some thirty pounds of plutonium, a crude explosive, injected into this planet's core. The rarified atmosphere had broken down the component parts of methane and ammonia into something which could be breathed everywhere on the planet. There were enough seas to provide air saturation and guarantee rainfall, and enough deposits of eroded soil to make crops possible.

When he returned just after dark, he had a map of the planet as it now existed and he could send, by latitude and longitude, four other planes to scatter tons of various seeds.

When he had sent them he found Tommer recovering from a bad case of seasickness. Tommer was sitting by the galley stove being consoled by Barteber and trying to get warm.

Sleepy was about to add his condolences when a sputter of jets told of a landing spacecraft and visitors.

Doyle was in complete helmet and ammonia suit, as were the rest, and they were astonished to find a window open. Nervously, Doyle made a motion to close it, saw that Sleepy, Barteber and Tommer wore no helmets and gingerly removed their own.

"I got action," said Doyle. "I brought your vice president in charge of construction and he has seen fit—"

"Hello, Bainsly," said Sleepy.

"Hello, Sleepy. What's up?"

"You're in time to inspect," said Sleepy. "But have a drink." He poured several tumblers full. "She's got a proper atmosphere, with plenty of water in the right places. She's got soil and the boys are out scattering seeds to hold it where it is, and I guess that is about that. We're nine days ahead of deadline so that's a nine-million bonus."

Doyle didn't drink. "That's impossible! When I left here twenty-one days ago, nothing had been done. You worked for four months—"

"You mean we studied potentials for four months," said Sleepy.

"You could have done this in half the time!" Doyle raged. "I demand to know why you fooled around with those cats!"

"Come," said Sleepy, and moved his languid length out to the deck.

He took the others over to the hut which had been sealed on Doyle's departure and had the seal struck off.

"Witnesses will state that this has not been opened since you last entered it, Doyle . . . Come in, gentlemen."

Sleepy then began to tear up the flooring with a crowbar and shortly there were revealed cat-track pins, detonators and all manner of necessary small equipment.

"The cats were bait, Doyle," said Sleepy. "Bainsly here can tell you a lot about such things. You wanted to slow us down and you thought you did. You would have gotten an entire planet remake for nothing, and transportation for your colonists as well, if this sabotage had succeeded. But you didn't kill any men, and so I don't think my company will make a charge. You'll have to talk it over with Bainsly, of course, but unless you've got nine million cash here and now, Planetary Construction will be putting up one planet for auction. And that's profitable enough, Doyle."

The inspection party had left early in the afternoon, taking the hope of Colonial Enterprises with them. Barteber was getting dinner and singing about a "gal who wouldn't say her prayers" and Tommer sat listening to the sad, sad fate of that creature.

Tommer's gaze shifted to the visograph and the stud poker game with Mart Lonegan.

Mart was winning today and his debt was down to eighteen thousand dollars.

"Mr. McGee," Tommer said at last, "do you think it would take me very long to learn stud poker?"

"Why no, Tommer. Not at all. In fact, I'd be willing to teach you myself."

The men were thrown into space like a dozen wriggling silverfish



KALEIDOSCOPE

By RAY BRADBURY

THE first concussion cut the ship up the side like a giant can opener. The men were thrown into space like a dozen wriggling silverfish. They were scattered into a dark sea; and the ship, in a million pieces, went on like a meteor swarm seeking a lost sun.

"Barkley, Barkley, where are you?"

The sound of voices calling like lost children on a cold night.

"Woode, Woode!"

"Captain!"

"Hollis, Hollis, this is Stone."

"Stone, this is Hollis. Where are you?"

"I don't know, how can I? Which way

It's a Long, Long Way Down Through Space!

is up? I'm falling. Good gosh, I'm falling."

They fell. They fell as pebbles fall in the long autumns of childhood, silver and thin. They were scattered as jackstones are scattered from a gigantic throw. And now instead of men there were only voices—all kinds of voices, disembodied and impassioned, in varying degrees of terror and resignation.

"We're going away from each other."

This was true. Hollis, swinging head over heels, knew this was true. He knew it with a vague acceptance. They were parting to go their separate ways, and nothing could bring them back. They were wearing their sealed-tight space suits with the glass tubes over their pale faces, but they hadn't had time to lock on their force units. With them, they could be small lifeboats in space, saving themselves, saving others, collecting together, finding each other until they were an island of men with some plan. But without the force units snapped to their shoulders they were meteors, senseless, each going to a separate and irrevocable fate.

A period of perhaps ten minutes elapsed while the first terror died and a metallic calm took its place. Space began to weave their strange voices in and out, on a great dark loom, crossing, recrossing, making a final pattern.

"Stone to Hollis. How long can we talk by phone?"

"It depends on how fast you're going your way and I'm going mine."

"An hour, I make it."

"That should do it," said Hollis, abstracted and quiet.

"What happened?" said Hollis, a minute later.

"The rocket blew up, that's all. Rockets do blow up."

"Which way are you going?"

"It looks like I'll hit the sun."

"It's Earth for me. Back to old Mother Earth at ten thousand miles per hour. I'll burn like a match." Hollis thought of it with a queer abstraction of mind. He seemed to be removed from his body, watching it fall down and down through space, as objective as he had been in regard to the first falling snowflakes of a winter season long gone.

THE others were silent, thinking of the destiny that had brought them to this, falling, falling, and nothing they

could do to change it. Even the captain was quiet, for there was no command or plan he knew that could put things back together again.

"Oh, it's a long way down, oh, it's a long way down, a long, long, long way down," said a voice. "I don't want to die, I don't want to die, it's a long way down."

"Who's that?"

"I don't know."

"Stimson, I think. Stimson, is that you?"

"It's a long long way and I don't like it, oh God, I don't like it."

"Stimson, this is Hollis, Stimson, you hear me?"

A pause while they fell separate from one another.

"Stimson?"

"Yes." He replied at last.

"Stimson, take it easy, we're all in the same fix."

"I don't want to be here, I want to be somewhere else."

"There's a chance we'll be found."

"I must be, I must be," said Stimson.

"I don't believe this, I don't believe any of this is happening."

"It's a bad dream," said someone.

"Shut up!" said Hollis.

"Come and make me," said the voice.

It was Applegate. He laughed easily, with a similar objectivity. "Come and shut me up."

Hollis for the first time felt the impossibility of his position. A great anger filled him, for he wanted more than anything in existence at this moment to be able to do something to Applegate. He had wanted for many years to do something and now it was too late. Applegate was only a telephonic voice.

Falling, falling, falling!

NOW, as if they had discovered the horror, two of the men began to scream. In a nightmare, Hollis saw one of them float by, very near, screaming and screaming.

"Stop it!" The man was almost at his fingertips, screaming irsanelly. He would never stop. He would go on screaming for a million miles, as long as he was in radio range, disturbing all of them, making it impossible for them to talk to one another.

Hollis reached out. It was best this way. He made the extra effort and

touched the man. He grasped the man's ankle and pulled himself up along the body until he reached the head. The man screamed and clawed frantically, like a drowning swimmer. The screaming filled the universe.

One way or the other, thought Hollis. The sun or Earth or meteors will kill him, so why not now?

He smashed the man's glass mask with his iron fist. The screaming stopped. He pushed off from the body and let it spin away on its own course, falling, falling.

Falling, falling down space went Hollis and the rest of them in the long, endless dropping and whirling of silent terror.

"Hollis, you still there?"

Hollis did not speak, but felt the rush of heat in his face.

"This is Applegate again."

"All right, Applegate."

"Let's talk. We haven't anything else to go."

The captain cut in. "That's enough of that. We've got to figure a way out of this."

"Captain, why don't you shut up?" said Applegate.

"What?"

"You heard me, Captain. Don't pull your rank on me, you're ten thousand miles away by now, and let's not kid ourselves. As Stimson puts it, it's a long way down."

"See here, Applegate!"

"Can it. This a mutiny of one. I haven't a dang thing to lose. Your ship was a bad ship and you were a bad captain and I hope you roast when you hit the sun."

"I'm ordering you to stop!"

"Go on, order me again." Applegate smiled across ten thousand miles. The captain was silent. Applegate continued, "Where were we, Hollis? Oh, yes, I remember. I hate you, too. But you know that. You've known it for a long time."

Hollis clenched his fists, helplessly.

"I want to tell something," said Applegate. "Make you happy I was the one who blackballed you with the Rocket Company five years ago."

A meteor flashed by. Hollis looked down and his left hand was gone. Blood spurted. Suddenly there was no air in his suit. He had enough air in his lungs to move his right hand over and twist a knob at his left elbow, tightening the

joint and sealing the leak. It had happened so quickly that he was not surprised. Nothing surprised him any more. The air in the suit came back to normal in an instant now that the leak was sealed. And the blood that had flowed so swiftly was pressured as he fastened the knob yet tighter, until it made a tourniquet.

All of this took place in a terrible silence on his part. And the other men chatted. That one man, Lespere, went on and on with his talk about his wife on Mars, his wife on Venus, his wife on Jupiter, his money, his wondrous times, his drunkenness, his gambling, his happiness. On and on, while they all fell, fell. Lespere reminisced on the past, happy, while he fell to his death.

IT was so very odd. Space, thousands of miles of space, and these voices vibrating in the center of it. No one visible at all, and only the radio waves quivering and trying to quicken other men into emotion.

"Are you angry, Hollis?"

"No." And he was not. The abstraction had returned and he was a thing of dull concrete, forever falling nowhere.

"You wanted to get to the top all your life, Hollis. And I ruined it for you. You always wondered what happened. I put the black mark on you just before I was tossed out myself."

"That isn't important," said Hollis. And it was not. It was gone. When life is over it is like a flicker of bright film, an instant on the screen, all of its prejudices and passions condensed and illuminated for an instant on space, and before you could cry out. There was a happy day, there a bad one, there an evil face, there a good one, the film burned to a cinder, the screen went dark.

From this outer edge of his life, looking back, there was only one remorse. And that was only that he wished to go on living. Did all dying people feel this way, as if they had never lived? Does life seem that short, indeed, over and down before you took a breath? Did it seem this abrupt and impossible to everyone, or only to himself, here, now with a few hours left to him for thought and deliberation?

One of the other men was talking.

"Well, I had me a good life. I had a wife

on Mars and one on Venus and one on Earth and one on Jupiter. Each of them had money and they treated me swell. I had a wonderful time. I got drunk and once I gambled away twenty thousand dollars."

"But you're here now," thought Hollis. "I didn't have any of those things. When I was living I was jealous of you, Lespere, when I had another day ahead of me I envied you your women and your good times. Women frightened me and I went into space, always wanting them, and jealous of you for having them, and money, and as much happiness as you could have in your own wild way. But now, falling here, with everything over, I'm not jealous of you any more, because it's over for you as it is over for me, and right now it's like it never was." Hollis craned his face forward and shouted into the telephone.

"It's all over, Lespere!"

Silence.

"It's just as if it never was, Lespere!"

"Who's that?" Lespere's faltering voice.

"This is Hollis."

He was being mean. He felt the meanness, the senseless meanness of dying. Applegate had hurt him, now he wanted to hurt another. Applegate and space had both wounded him.

"You're out here, Lespere. It's all over. It's just as if it had never happened, isn't it?"

"No."

"When anything's over, it's just like it never happened. Where's your life any better than mine, now? While it was happening, yes, but now? Now is what counts. Is it any better, is it?"

"Yes, it's better!"

"How!"

"Because I got my thoughts; I remember!" cried Lespere, far away, indignant, holding his memories to his chest with both hands.

AND he was right. With a feeling of cold water gushing through his head and his body, Hollis knew he was right. There were differences between memories and dreams. He had only dreams of things he had wanted to do, while Lespere had memories of things done and accomplished. And this knowledge began to pull Hollis apart, with a slow, quivering precision.

"What good does it do you?" he cried

to Lespere. "Now? When a thing's over it's not good any more. You're no better off than me."

"I'm resting easy," said Lespere. "I've had my turn. I'm not getting mean at the end, like you."

"Mean?" Hollis turned the word on his tongue. He had never been mean, as long as he could remember, in his life. He had never dared to be mean. He must have saved it all of these years for such a time as this. "Mean." He rolled the word into the back of his mind. He felt tears start into his eyes and roll down his face. Someone must have heard his gasping voice.

"Take it easy, Hollis."

It was, of course, ridiculous. Only a minute before he had been giving advice to others, to Stimson, he had felt a braveness which he had thought to be the genuine thing, and now he knew that it had been nothing but shock and the objectivity possible in shock. Now he was trying to pack a lifetime of suppressed emotion into an interval of minutes.

"I know how you feel, Hollis," said Lespere, now twenty thousand miles away, his voice fading. "I don't take it personally."

But aren't we equal, his wild mind wondered. Lespere and I? Here, now? If a thing's over it's done, and what good is it? You die anyway. But he knew he was rationalizing, for it was like trying to tell the difference between a live man and a corpse. There was a spark in one, and not in the other, an aura, a mysterious element.

So it was with Lespere and himself; Lespere had lived a good full life, and it made him a different man now, and he, Hollis, had been as good as dead for many years. They came to death by separate paths and, in all likelihood, if there were kinds of deaths, their kinds would be as different as night from day. The quality of death, like that of life, must be of infinite variety, and if one has already died once, then what is there to look for in dying for once and all, as he was now?

It was a second later that he discovered his right foot was cut sheer away. It almost made him laugh. The air was gone from his suit again, he bent quickly, and there was blood, and the meteor had taken flesh and suit away to the ankle. Oh, death in space was

most humorous, it cut you away, piece by piece, like a black and invisible butcher. He tightened the valve at the knee, his head whirling into pain, fighting to remain aware, and with the valve tightened, the blood retained, the air kept, he straightened up and went on falling, falling, for that was all there was left to do.

"Hollis?"

Hollis nodded sleepily, tired of waiting for death.

"This is Applegate again," said the voice.

"Yes."

"I've had time to think. I listened to you. This isn't good. It makes us mean. This is a bad way to die. It brings all the bile out. You listening, Hollis?"

"Yes."

"I lied. A minute ago. I lied. I didn't blackball you. I don't know why I said that. Guess I wanted to hurt you. You seemed the one to hurt. We've always fought. Guess I'm getting old fast and repenting fast. I guess listening to you be mean made me ashamed. Whatever the reason, I want you to know I was an idiot, too. There's not an ounce of truth in what I said. To heck with you."

HOLLIS felt his heart begin to work again. It seemed as if it hadn't worked for five minutes, but now all of his limbs began to take color and warmth. The shock was over, and the successive shocks of anger and terror and loneliness were passing. He felt like a man emerging from a cold shower in the morning, ready for breakfast and a new day.

"Thanks, Applegate."

"Don't mention it. Up your nose, you slob."

"Where's Stimson, how is he?"

"Stimson?"

They listened.

No answer.

"He must be gone."

"I don't think so. Stimson!"

They listened again.

They could hear a long slow, hard breathing in their phones.

"That's him. Listen."

"Stimson!"

No reply.

Only the slow, hard breathing.

"He won't answer."

"He's gone insane, God help him."

"That's it. Listen."

The silent breathing, the quiet.

"He's closed up like a clam. He's in himself, making a pearl. Lister to the poet, will you. He's happier than us now, anyway."

They listened to Stimson float away.

"Hey," said Stone.

"What?" Hollis called across space, for Stone, of all of them, was a good friend.

"I've got myself into a meteor swarm, some little asteroids."

"Meteors?"

"I think it's the Myrmidone cluster that goes out past Mars and in toward Earth once every five years. I'm right in the middle. It's like a big kaleidoscope. You get all kinds of colors and shapes and sizes. God, it's beautiful, all the metal."

Silence.

"I'm going with them," said Stone. "They're taking me off with them. I'll be damned." He laughed tightly.

Hollis looked to see, but saw nothing. There were only the great jewelries of space, the diamonds and sapphires and emerald mists and velvet inks of space, with God's voice mingling among the crystal fires. There was a kind of wonder and imagination in the thought of Stone going off in the meteor swarm, out past Mars for years and coming in toward Earth every five years, passing in and out of the planet's ken for the next million years, Stone and the Myrmidone cluster eternal and unending, shifting and shaping like the kaleidoscope colours when you were a child and held the long tube to the sun and gave it a twirl.

"So long, Hollis," Stone's voice, very faint now. "So long."

"Good luck," shouted Hollis across thirty thousand miles.

"Don't be funny," said Stone, and was gone.

The stars closed in.

Now all the voices were fading, each on their own trajectories, some to the sun, others into farthest space. And Hollis himself. He looked down. He, of all the others, was going back to Earth alone.

"So long."

"Take it easy."

"So long, Hollis." That was Applegate.

The many good-bys. The short farewells. And now the great loose brain

was disintegrating. The components of the brain which had worked so beautifully and efficiently in the skull case of the rocket ship racing through space, were dying one by one, the meaning of their life together was falling apart. And as a body dies when the brain ceases functioning, so the spirit of the ship and their long time together and what they meant to one another was dying. Applegate was now no more than a finger blown from the parent body, no longer to be despised and worked against. The brain was exploded, and the senseless, useless fragments of it were far-scattered. The voices faded and now all of space was silent. Hollis was alone, falling.

They were all alone. Their voices had died like echoes of the words of God spoken and vibrating in the starred space. There went the captain to the sun; there Stone with the meteor swarm; there Stimson, tightened and unto himself; there Applegate toward Pluto; there Smith and Turner and Underwood and all the rest, the shards of the kaleidoscope that had formed a thinking pattern for so long, now hurled apart.

And I? thought Hollis. What can I do? Is there anything I can do now to

make up for a terrible and empty life? If I could do one good thing to make up for the meanness I collected all these years and didn't even know was in me? But there's no one here, but myself, and how can you do good all alone? You can't. Tomorrow night I'll hit Earth's atmosphere.

I'll burn, he thought, and be scattered in ashes all over the continental lands. I'll be put to use. Just a little bit, but ashes are ashes and they'll add to the land.

He fell swiftly, like a bullet, like a pebble, like an iron weight, objective, objective all of the time now, not sad or happy or anything, but only wishing he could do a good thing now that everyone was gone, a good thing for just himself to know about.

When I hit the atmosphere, I'll burn like a meteor.

"I wonder," he said. "If anyone'll see me?"

The small boy on the country road looked up and screamed. "Look, Mom, look! A falling star!"

The blazing white star fell down the sky of dusk in Illinois.

"Make a wish," said his mother. "Make a wish."



"A Is for Alchemy—"

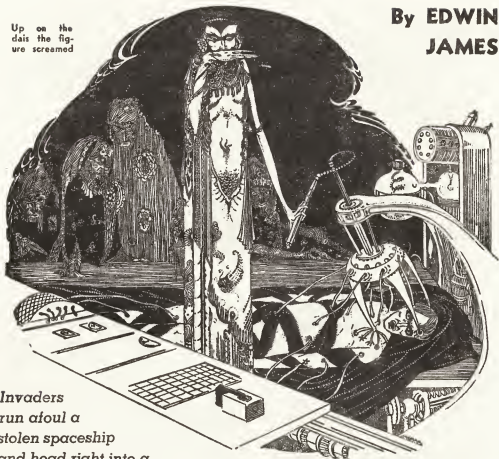
AND B is for beauty, C for conjuring, D for disappearance—and one could go through the primer all the way to S for Science, then to W for wonder, in order to name all the elements that go to make up that land of magic and mystery, Malesco. First torch-singer Lorna Maxwell, then actor Eddie Burton, go through the gate which leads to this strange world—and find themselves in a community where a priesthood, as in Egypt, holds all the keys to scientific progress.

The Malescans believe New York is paradise—and are held in subjection through this belief. Visit Malesco—where science is magic, and magic, science—with Lorna Maxwell and Eddie Burton in *THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE*, by Henry Kuttner, featured in the September issue of our companion magazine, *STARTLING STORIES*—now on sale, 25c at all stands.

It's a novel of enchanting brilliance, highlighted by entertaining satire and gentle spoofing—one of the finest novels Henry Kuttner has ever written!

Up on the
dais the fig-
ure screamed

By EDWIN
JAMES



*Invaders
run afoul a
stolen spaceship
and head right into a—*

PARADOX

THE communications officer hastily flicked the Commander's switch and pushed the button for playback. The thought record slowly began to revolve.

From: Bureau of Exploration, Intelligence Division

To: Commander, Exploration Party 3-127h
Subject: Solar System 3-127h—Exploration and Investigation of and Countermeasures Concerning.

1. Your thought message 7-158-763 received and noted.

2. Institute plan r-72.

The commander quickly flipped the amplifier switch.

"Stop all interference tactics. The next space-ship will be seized and its occupants analyzed," he thought.

SAM was poorly surnamed Bright but then he had nothing to do with it. Neither had his parents but mercifully they had long since passed into the anonymity of death.

If Sam had lived up to his name only partially he would not have been a thief. Certainly he would have had nothing to do with the area enclosed with barbed wire which he had been studying so carefully for the last few days. But Sam didn't even read the papers.

"Readin's a waste of time," said Sam at the age of ten and thereupon entered into a career of crime which was, in its

way, noteworthy. A manual dexterity and a mechanical aptitude which amounted almost to genius had substituted for his lack of natural intelligence and made Sam a small success in his chosen field. Those and a few simple rules slowly impressed on him by friends or experience had kept Sam in relative comfort and out of the hands of the law.

"Somethin' valuable's well guarded and vice versa," was one of them, and this area was swarming with more guards than Sam had ever seen.

Sam licked his lips in anticipation. This haul might well be enough to keep him in ease for the rest of his life and Sam relished the thought of lording it over his former companions in crime—especially Bessie, the cute, flippant and brittle-hard pickpocket, who had looked down at him and laughed when he had—

Oh, well, Sam thought, it was true. He was short and small and thirty-five—but not so dumb—no, sir, not so dumb. Sam thought of Bessie again and sighed.

Sam jumped as the shadows touched him where he stood among the trees. He hastily turned around three times and spat over his left shoulder. The sun was almost down and Sam shivered. This was the part he didn't like, working at night. Sam didn't know what kind of things came out at night but he suspected—and his suspicions whispered that they were up to no good.

"Kee-pa-way cree-pa-way
Stay-a-way way-a-way
Gogogogogogogo!"

Sam had repeated the charm so often that the words no longer had any individual meaning. They were as meaningless to him as any witch doctor's chant and to Sam's notion more powerful. Seven was the magic number of syllables for the last line but occasionally Sam added an extra one or two for good measure. This routine he had evolved for himself through endless fearful hours from childhood up and Sam was fond of adding proudly and thankfully that it had always worked.

Now he was ready for business.

Sam had decided upon the time just after sunset, when the guard would be changing and attention diverted. He switched on the small machine at the foot of the tree and carefully adjusted a

knob. Cautious tests had determined the proper frequency—a word Sam didn't know but whose concept he had right at the tips of his blunt fingers. That should bypass the alarm system for this stretch of fence. Sam took one last glance at the now completely black sky.

HE picked up a small pack and strode boldly toward the fence, parted its strands, and slipped between them. The guards were gathered for instructions at the gate far to the right. Sam watched them for a moment and then started across the paved field toward the large building in the center some two thousand yards away. He walked along casually in his overalls, carrying in one hand the tools of his trade. If noticed he hoped to pass for a workman.

One thousand yards were behind him. Sam began to breathe more easily.

"It's gettin' out," he muttered. Sam didn't know just how easy and quick that was going to be.

He was close to the building now. It towered above him, darker even than the sky. Sam was in its shadow.

"Halt, there! Halt!" came a barked command.

Sam froze. A small spot of light sprang into being and began to play over the building.

"Who's there?"

The flashlight was getting closer. Sam opened his mouth to speak as the diffused light around the edge of the spot began to show up his surroundings. He forced his mouth shut and stepped quickly back. The spot passed by and continued down the building, played haphazardly and went out.

"Nerves, man, nerves." A mutter reached him. "Nothing but nerves."

Sam slowly stopped trembling and wiped the sweat off his hands onto his pants. He felt around and discovered that what he had happened into was a small doorway. He tried the door—it was locked. Sam chuckled and began to whistle softly to himself as he slipped a small metal hook into the lock, opened the door and stepped inside.

Everything was black. Deciding not to chance blundering around in the dark, Sam flipped on a small pocket flashlight. He almost dropped it. Inside this large building was a smaller one, a smooth metallic glistening cylinder.

After a moment Sam shrugged his shoulders. People were funny about things like that. He'd heard they buried gold in Tennessee.

His excitement rose as he began to revise the estimate of his haul drastically upward. A setup like this wouldn't be for something ordinary. It might well be jewels, crown jewels, maybe. Sam began to worry about where to fence the stuff.

When he reached the cylinder he could find no trace of an opening. He circled it, puzzled. This was something new. Sam played his light up the side of the shiny building and walked slowly around it.

He saw a faint crack halfway up. Luckily they had left a ladder handy. Sam carefully maneuvered it into place, setting it against the cylinder with the faintest of clicks, a click which the cavernous surrounding building multiplied until Sam winced and flicked out his light to wait for a few tremulous moments.

The silence crept back again. Sam made his way carefully up the ladder until he was opposite the crack in the shiny wall. He traced it with his finger all the way around in an oval. It was just a faint crack, nothing more. No lock, no handle, nothing. Sam scratched his head and sat down on the top rung to think.

Sam decided that wouldn't do any good and turned back to the cylinder, fumbling into his bag of tools. He donned a stethoscope, fitting the other end to the place on the door where a lock would normally be. He switched on a small machine and ran the knob slowly around. Nothing. It wasn't sound. He tried radio frequencies and at the top of the dial got a faint click.

The door began to swing inexorably outward and suddenly Sam was dangling from the top of the door, straining frantically to keep the ladder from slipping off his feet to crash down to the floor. For a breathless second Sam hung there, unable to move. Then he swung himself slowly around the oval block into the opening revealed, still gripping the ladder desperately between his feet. He was seated and there hadn't been a sound. Sam shook for a moment and unsteadily picked himself up.

The thin pencil of light revealed another door only a foot from his nose,

but as Sam closed the door behind him the one in front clicked open. It made Sam think of bank vaults, a relationship he didn't stop to analyze. He stepped cautiously into the little room and stopped short, puzzled. This was getting queerer and queerer.

The room was fitted up with a deep chair fixed firmly to the floor. The chair faced a series of dials, knobs and buttons. Overhead was a blank square of frosted glass. Sam wished suddenly that he were someplace else. Somewhere here there must be something valuable to be protected with such vast precautions but it was getting beyond Sam's depth.

He sank into the chair, letting his arm fall carelessly along the right armrest. He tried to think. Somewhere he had seen something like this before.

Slowly the mists of his mind were penetrated by a low humming sound. Glancing up, Sam saw a black square illuminated with red letters lighted up among the dials. He puzzled over the two words:

FULL AUTOMATIC

Something clicked in Sam's mind. He sat bolt upright in the chair, his left hand gripping the left armrest firmly. He remembered a scene like this before—it had been an airplane cockpit in his one trip off the ground, a trip he didn't intend repeating. Sam wanted out violently, more than he had ever wanted anything—even Bessie. Then things began to happen.

Another black square flashed red letters:

COURSE SET

And another:

ENGINE READY

Sam's head swiveled back and forth in an agony of confusion and indecision. Things were going too fast. The oval door to the left completed his hysteria by slowly closing and clicking shut.

Sam ignored another black square which said:

RELEASE WHEN READY

He jumped to his feet, weak and shaking violently with fear. A low roar assailed his ears. His feet were so heavy he couldn't lift them from the floor. His body seemed to have put on tons of extra weight. The room whirled madly

around him as he fell back into the chair. Sam fainted.

SAM had bad dreams. There was something about the moon, but a moon which was huge and swollen and getting bigger. There was something about a deft, quick manipulation of unfamiliar knobs and levers. There was something about skimming over a barren landscape of tortured rocks, peaks and valleys and coming to rest beside a huge, dull-black cylinder which reached out a caressing arm to draw him in . . . in . . . in . . .

Sam groaned. His head ached savagely.

"If this is their best we have no reason for concern," a thought came into his mind.

"Our investigations indicate that this is a time of crisis in their development. Only a supreme representative would be sent on a mission of such crucial importance. Moreover, his resistance to control was greater than the others by almost a decimal point."

Sam opened his eyes and blinked at the two fuzzy images which stood close beside him.

"Okay, you've got me," Sam said bitterly. "But it was that damn machine!"

"An amazingly quick diagnosis of the situation!" came the thought. "He is even aware of the use of the machine!"

"Perhaps he is more intelligent than he seems. But such a non-telepathic race can present no real problems."

Sam shook his head to clear it of the fog and the disembodied voices. His eyes began to focus and the figures stood out more clearly. His eyes widened as he tried to shrink back in the cot to which he was fastened. Sam's hand went to the bag at his throat while his lips began moving silently.

"Did you intercept that?" The thought was puzzled.

There was a long pause.

"Yes-s-s." Hastily. "Obviously intended to confuse—an attempt to block the natural flow of thought." More slowly. "A development our science assures us is impossible."

"Exactly, Commander. Impossible for our race, at least. And so I perceive that your reaction was the same as mine. There was no attempt at confusion. It was bound up with an emotional reaction. If this were not a mem-

ber of a race able to achieve space flight I might suggest a primitive superstitious rite—but such obviously cannot be the case.

"No. We detected nothing like it in the pilots of the other space-ships we destroyed. They were all semantically trained."

"An immensely frightening thought, at whose nature we can only guess. This will require deep study."

"Of course. The Intelligence directive was explicit and demanded emergency treatment. R-seventy-two is not instituted without good reason. But this is your problem, Psychologist."

"Very well, Commander. I shall report as soon as I discover something of value."

Sam felt a little better as one of the figures receded from his field of vision. One of them was frightening enough, but two were too much. That these were evil spirits he had no doubt, even if they were vaguely human in form.

The non-human part was god-like—tall, straight and powerful, radiating calm and a confident serenity, serene in the knowledge that its race was the destined master of the universe, cold with intellect that knows no equal, no bounds, no mercy. But, for Sam, the bristling eyebrows were the giveaway, the eyebrows that waved and wiggled independently.

Sam wondered if he were dead. The little pack of tools still hung from his shoulder however and Sam, somehow, didn't think those would be carried along to wherever dead people went. Besides, his head ached too terrible and his body felt too solid. Sam gathered his courage together.

"See here," he said feebly. "Let me go this time and I promise never to bother you again."

The eyebrows focused on him and began to wiggle.

"That is impossible."

Sam jumped. He didn't like the way the answer appeared in his head. There were other things he didn't like about the situation but most of all he didn't like that.

"How did I get here?" he blurted out.

"You don't know?"

Sam sensed the amazement behind that thought.

"I see. Only vague ideas about machines—a large building on a wide

paved area—obviously the takeoff field—fences—shadows. Nothing but confusion! A blockage—a partial memory blockage! Something our science says is impossible. This problem goes deep.”

“Can’t we make some arrangement?” Sam asked plaintively.

“Arrangement? Our work will be easier with your co-operation. If you co-operate you will be treated properly.”

Sam caught a hint of evasion behind that thought but it slipped by. He thought it over. He didn’t mind co-operating, since there seemed nothing else to do. “Sure,” he said. “Sure. I’ll co-operate.”

AS the eyebrows bristled at him for a long studied moment Sam began to wonder what co-operation entailed. He breathed easier when it began as only another question.

“What is the basis of your society?” “Huh?”

“What is considered most important in your world?”

“Oh,” responded Sam. “Money. Sure—money. You can get anything with money.”

“I see—a medium of exchange. You do a certain amount of work and receive in return a specified amount of—money.”

Sam laughed. “Not me,” he said proudly. “I just take it. I don’t work.”

“An odd concept! Does someone take it from you then?”

“They hadn’t better try!” Sam blustered.

“Your mind is a mass of contradictions,” came the protesting thought.

“Oh, no it ain’t,” said Sam. “I ain’t contradicted about nothin’.”

“Could that be possible?” The thought was uncertain and rhetorical.

“If you think that’s funny,” suggested Sam helpfully, “you should try to figure out the one about the barber who shaves every man in town but who doesn’t shave himself. Does the barber shave himself? That’s the question, see?”

Sam glanced at the spirit. It was standing in a posture of intense concentration, eyes tightly closed, eyebrows sticking stiffly out, face puzzled.

Sam smiled and went to sleep.

* * * * *

The next few days blurred into each other with question after question

thrown at him by a series of inquisitors. Machines ringed Sam, probing at him with rays, calipers, gadgets of all kinds and descriptions. Sam didn’t mind.

He had almost gone through a complete Army physical once before he was rejected for lack of education.

It was the questions that interested Sam—not that he understood them or their purpose or had wit enough to answer them any way but truthfully—but it amused him endlessly to see the deep studies into which his truthful answers threw his questioners.

After each period of investigation Sam was taken to an improvised cell and locked in. As a cell it was the most luxurious room Sam had ever enjoyed, with every comfort he had ever imagined and some that he had never dreamed about.

There was a bunk softer than air, soft sleepy music, exotic foods that slipped mysteriously out of the wall, symphonies of color that changed at the touch of a dial. Sam began to enjoy himself.

BACK in the inquisition room Sam had fallen to sleep under the machines one day to be awakened by troubled thoughts—not his own.

“For centuries our greatest scientists have theorized about the existence of such a race as this, Commander—a non-telepathic race—but their theorizations have only begun to scratch the surface of the truth.”

“Our science is the greatest in the universe, Psychologist. You should watch more carefully the thoughts that creep into your mind.”

“I meant no disparagement, as you well know. It is only that our scientists have not had the opportunity to observe the terrifying reality of this race’s existence. But I hope yet to reach the bottom of this matter.”

“The problem is one of getting into the man’s mind, thinking as he thinks, believing what he believes. Because the very lack of telepathy will have made his race develop so differently that even though we can communicate we cannot comprehend without understanding that development.”

“I do not understand, Psychologist.”

“Nor I—not completely. But you see telepathy makes us incapable of evasion,

lying, deceit. Our minds are clear to each other. There can be no misunderstanding or confusion of terms. With the people of this man's race I am not sure. They must communicate by means of symbols put into the form of sound waves, symbols which may be imperfect and may lead to confusion between the symbol and the thing symbolized."

"That is nonsense, Psychologist. I think you are allowing your thoughts to drift into fantasy. Leave that to the Composer. These concepts you are projecting have no meaning. I cannot even conceive of their having validity under any conditions."

"Exactly. We cannot grasp any concepts so completely alien to our psychology—and we must grasp them before we can understand this man and his race."

"It is your field. I must accept your judgment of the situation. But do you feel perfectly capable of continuing with the investigation?"

"I must. There is no one else with sufficient training to analyze effectively."

"Very well then. How far has the report advanced?"

"We have all the physical facts. But when it comes to analyzing this man's thought patterns our machines give misleading information or breaks down. The sanity machine, for instance, registers him as insane—an obvious mechanical failure. Machines are not as flexible as the human mind. We must tackle it ourselves."

"Yourself, Psychologist."

"Of course. The difficulties lie in the incomprehensible inconsistencies in this man and his race. For instance, he is convinced that he has a firm right to whatever he can take from the other members of his race."

"An unusual basis for a civilization."

"True, Commander. But even more unusual is the fact that this man would fight to the death to defend anything he considers his."

"Incredible! Are you certain this man is typical?"

"That seems the only assumption to start from. Would they send a non-typical member of the race on such a trip. Obviously not. And his resistance to our thought guidance offers proof that he is a superior member of his race."

"In another instance, he believes in psychic manifestations, while at the same time he does not consider himself superstitious. Apparently he is smaller than the average size of the male members of his race and yet he is belligerently convinced that he is the physical equal of any."

"These inconsistencies are mind-destroying!"

"And yet, Commander—are they inconsistencies? Or only apparent inconsistencies? Or are they deliberate? If so they may indicate that this race is inherently superior to ours."

"Absurd, Psychologist!"

"Perhaps. But we can ignore no possibility. For instance—"

"Enough! The problem is yours. These thoughts are too disturbing at the moment. Proceed as you consider best."

SAM yawned as one of the figures left the room. The other bristled his eyebrows at him defiantly.

"Come!" said the voice in his mind. "You will see a sample of the mighty civilization we represent."

Sam followed docilely, the implications of the recent sequence of events beginning to form a vague pattern in his mind. If these were spirits they were spirits with designs on more than himself—they had evil plans for his home, Earth. Sam suddenly found within himself a strange yearning for familiar scenes and familiar faces.

As Sam was led from room to room, filled with massive, mysterious machinery that performed unbelievable things before his eyes, it came to him that Earth might not be so nice a place to return to soon. One machine built up a huge, brilliantly sparkling jewel out of air, then a variety of objects ranging from simple minerals to rare metals. Sam failed to grasp an explanation about the rearrangement of atomic structure. Another machine transported an object from one closed room to another.

"The range is unlimited for solar distances," said the voice in Sam's mind. "That object might have been a bomb."

Sam swallowed. He had a feeling that their bombs were something cataclysmic.

Another machine melted a large hole in a plate of foot-thick metal. Then, smiling, Sam's guide stepped within the

range of the gadget—and stood there unharmed.

"The power of our minds prevents our destruction."

A small spot began to smolder on the guide's tunic as he stepped away. Sam thought nothing about it but the other stared down in horror and brushed at it hurriedly.

The tour took another tack. Sam was led into a large room where low pallets surrounded a small dais upon which a figure was reclining. Sam and his guide slipped down onto cots and Sam closed his eyes in the darkened room in obedience to the other's motion. Sam felt sleepy.

Sam sat up straight. Something different was creeping into his mind. He was motioned back impatiently. Sam reluctantly closed his eyes again. Visions began to drift into his mind, pictures, then unheard symphonies, unfelt tactile sensations, unsmelled odors, emotions. It was almost too much.

Slowly the sensations began to sort themselves out into an ordered pattern, a story told through every sense, a many-faceted symphonic portrait, a magnificent work of art with which the mind soared to might heights of emotion. It wrung the soul and filled it up again. It was a celestial experience.

It bothered Sam. It was confusion and noise, even though silent. He hated it. It built up and up in a malignant crescendo until Sam thought it would take off the top of his head. This was the way they did it, he thought suddenly. This was their torture to drive you mad and steal away your soul.

Sam began to mumble and the pressure began to go away. His lips moved more rapidly.

Up on the dais the figure screamed—a thin silent mental scream of agony that brought every figure in the room shuddering to its feet. The scream came again. The shadows turned menacingly toward Sam. Sam shrank back. They began to advance on him.

The Psychologist tried to shield him, throwing out stern mental commands. But it was useless, as scream after scream came from the dais and the frenzied shadows continued their slow menacing advance.

Sam reached for the bag at his throat and concentrated on his mumbling while he tried to keep his knees from shaking.

Suddenly the advance stopped and the line began to shrink back.

Sam found himself in the hall, the Psychologist beside him, holding his head.

"Guard! Guard!" came the tortured mental call.

Sam was whisked back to his cell. As he reclined once more on his bunk he began to reflect on his experience. His thoughts weren't deep but they were definite.

He didn't like this place. It grew worse all the time. Sam decided to leave. For Sam it was as simple as that.

IT was dark when Sam finally decided the time was right. The door was the difficulty—he had realized that at first. Luckily they had left him his tools, probably in scorn, after they had been analyzed. In a way they were right. The tools should have been useless. But in Sam's fingers there was magic.

The lock was released by a mental code signal. Sam heard it so often he had hopes of doing it himself. Sam concentrated.

The door stayed obstinately locked.

Sam was only momentarily discouraged. Hastily he stripped down his electronic machine to the bare essentials and began shifting wires in a pattern he had memorized with his sensitive fingertips in a recent unguarded moment in the laboratory. Those fingers now flashed without hesitation. Under them a new machine was growing, a miracle was being performed.

He settled back with a sigh. It was finished. If the batteries were still good and he had made no mistake—Sam didn't like to think about what might happen if he had made a mistake.

Sam flicked the switch quickly, let the set warm up and lowered his forehead to a pair of exposed wires. A light electric shock went through him and Sam shivered. His head began to feel airy and he concentrated on his task. He tried harder, repeating the coded signal again and again.

Sam sighed and slumped back in defeat only to stare amazedly at the open door. Then he was all motion, stowing away his tools, slinging his knapsack over his shoulder, stepping quickly to the door. The hall was empty. Sam stepped out, only to duck back quickly as a shrill mental scream echoed in his

mind. He minced his way out again, resolved to be bolder, but wavering as new screams assailed his mind.

All at once the screams were silenced—cut off in mid-scream. Sam moved more easily but more cautiously in the sudden mental silence. He began to wonder at the absence of guards as he peered down silent corridor after corridor.

Suddenly there was noise behind him—real noise, mingled with maudlin mental voices. Sam flattened himself against the wall as three of the strange figures reeled past him, linked arm in arm, their thoughts forming a drunken kaleidoscope. One of them gave Sam a curious glance and burst into high mental laughter. The other two joined him as they reeled on. Sam scratched his head. "Drunk!" he exclaimed to himself. Sam shrugged his shoulders. It was no problem of his.

Sam tiptoed on, catching snatches of mental conversation and monologue. Then he caught something that sounded familiar.

"Ah, Commander. I think I have solved the problem."

"Indeed, Psychologist."

Sam stopped short and leaned against the corridor wall.

"Yes. I have thought my way into the man's mind. At last I understand him. As I thought, his inconsistencies are only apparent. Now everything is crystal clear."

"This will be something, at least, to report. I hope it has not come too late."

"Too late! Ah, no, Commander. This discovery may well revolutionize our psychological science, our entire thought patterns."

"If the discovery had come much later, Psychologist, it might have been disastrous. First the composer, then the others. I don't mind informing you that I was prepared to take drastic measures."

"I understand what you had in mind, Commander, but there is no need for that now. No, indeed. The problem has been solved. We are the ones who were falling into error. Our thought patterns were all awry."

"Ours!"

"Yes, indeed! You see, Commander, it all depends on a dual concept of reality, a dual recognition of the twin patterns of the universe, *at one and the same time.*"

"But how, Psychologist?"

"That was the problem—how to achieve that dual recognition! Follow my thoughts closely, Commander. *It takes a splitting of the ego, of the mind itself and individual cognition on the part of each.*"

"Impossible!"

"So it would seem! But I have done it, Commander! My mind at this moment perceives the twin realities. Follow me, Commander!"

There was a moment of mental silence—then a gasp. The next thought came dully.

First the composer. Then the others. And now—"

Sam hurried on. Behind him the wall glowed for a moment and then paled again to normal.

Here it was—a tall oval door. Sam walked through, into a small room opening on another door whose thick, oval block was swinging ajar. Past that Sam walked through a tube. At the end of it a small oval door was open. Sam closed it behind him. He sighed. It almost seemed like home again.

There was the small room, the deep chair, the series of dials, knobs and buttons—and overhead the blank square of frosted glass. Sam sank down in the chair and pressed the right armrest.

FULL AUTOMATIC

Sam pressed the left armrest.

COURSE SET

ENGINE READY

The oval door to the left swung shut and clicked. Sam lifted both hands and was pressed back into the chair. This time it wasn't so bad.

Somewhere in the space between the Moon and Earth the screen overhead brightened and then faded again. Sam puzzled over it for awhile and forgot it. If he had been looking the other direction he might have seen an aureole of light momentarily around the Moon. But Sam was looking toward Earth.

SAM opened the door slowly to the bright morning sunshine. The clamor almost forced him back. Sam blinked at the sea of screaming faces and stared blankly at the men who stepped toward him across the wooden platform placed against the ship at a level with the door.

Sam's shoulders slumped. This was it then. Sam moved slowly forward and held up his wrists mutely.

"I'm certainly glad to meet you," said one of the men, grabbing his hand. I'm Governor Stone, head of the official welcoming committee."

Sam stared at him blankly.

"This is certainly an occasion," exclaimed another of the men. "You're famous, man! You're the first man to reach the moon and come back again. You'll go down in history!"

Sam puzzled it over. Finally his face cleared.

"Ya mean I can beat the rap?"

The governor cleared his throat. "A mere technicality."

"Absolutely," said another. "Just think! Nine failures. Blown up enroute or zigzagging on into space. The first! The very first to return."

"A few questions before we present you to the crowd," the governor said. "How was the moon? What did it look like?"

"Rocky," said Sam. His mind was turning over.

"Rocky," echoed the Governor.

"How was the ship?" asked another man eagerly. "We built it you know. Everything automatic, even down to landing. Nothing to do. How was it?"

"I've seen better," said Sam.

"Better!" the man screamed. "This was absolutely the last word, the latest thing . . ." His voice faded away in sputters.

"How did you spend your time while you were there?" asked the Governor. "You were on the moon for almost four days, you know."

This was what Sam had been waiting for. He decided against it. Nobody ever believed him when he talked about spirits.

"Walkin'," he said.

"Walking," echoed the Governor feebly.

"Didn't you have trouble breathing?" asked one of the others eagerly. "There isn't supposed to be any air there."

"There ain't?" asked Sam, sarcastically. He had them there.

"Did you feel much lighter?"

"Think I'm crazy," retorted Sam angrily. "I weigh exactly one hundred and twenty-five pounds anyplace."

"One last one," said the Governor.

"Astronomers noticed a large flash last

night—apparently from the hidden side of the moon. Do you know anything about that?"

"Oh, that," Sam said, deprecatingly. "I lit a match."

"He lit a match," the Governor muttered.

"Governor! The crowd is getting restless."

The governor collected himself and stepping to the front of the platform spread out his arms for silence. Gradually the crowd stopped screaming.

"My friends," the Governor began. "My friends. We meet here upon an historic occasion to welcome back Earth's first space pioneer, a man so courageous, so manly, so American, that he overcame all obstacles to make his way past ever-watchful guards at the peril of his life and to the controls of a spaceship he had never seen, nine of which had been destroyed before."

"How can we condemn these actions, which, though reprehensible in the smaller light, in the larger view were motivated only by desire to bring greater glory to America and to Earth. I offer to you Earth's first, most courageous citizen. Mr.—Mr.—the name, the name —Mr.—"

"Bright," Sam said. "Sam Bright."

The Governor beamed. "Mr. Samuel Bright."

The crowd exploded. Sam, like a puppet on a string, nodded and waved. Finally the Governor was able to continue.

"Mr. Bright has the signal honor of being the only person on Earth who has stepped out on the Moon. In his own simple, dryly humorous words, the moon was 'rocky.'"

A ripple of laughter went through the crowd.

"In the short time I have had to speak with him I have learned only a few things about Mr. Bright's trip—the complete story of which you will learn soon—but Mr. Bright spoke highly of American ingenuity, faith and skill which made possible the trip he so recently made."

He had the highest praise for the ship and its builders—may they build many more to bring back glory to them and us—but most of all he wanted to thank you, the American people, who by your everlasting example, high-minded ideals and stern virtues inspired him

to become what he is today."

Sam's attention drifted. A movement in the crowd caught his eye. Could it be? It was! Bessie. Working in the crowd. Bessie always liked crowds. Somehow Sam wished she would look up. Just to see her made him warm again. He remembered her words once more and the warmth turned cold.

THERE! She looked up. She saw him in the place of honor. He chuckled as he saw incredulity, awe, finally cupidity chase themselves across her face.

"But now," the Governor said. "Now we have a duty to this noble, courageous man—a duty to show him that America—yes, and the whole world—knows what it is to welcome a returning hero. There's nothing too good for him!"

The crowd roared agreement as the group moved down the long steps from the platform. It was an incongruous picture—Sam in his working overalls, the men in dark business suits, the bright long-limbed tremulously beautiful girls in light prints. In front of them the police and soldiers cleared a path to the waiting automobiles. He could stand a lot of this, Sam thought.

"Sam!"

It was Bessie, panting, trying to break past an armed guard.

"Sam, it's *me*—Bessie! Tell this fool to let me through! It's all right, Sam. Sam!"

Sam's glance slid past her, no recognition in his eyes. Then his eyes swept

back and fell on her struggling figure. Sam turned to the Governor with a sweet, indulgent smile of his lips and shook his head at the vagaries of the human race.

"You, my dear!" he beckoned to one of the brightest of the bright young girls. She eagerly stepped to his side and hugged his arm against her.

"What are we going to do tonight?" Sam asked gayly.

"Anything you say, Mr. Bright." She shivered deliciously. "You know what the Governor said. Anything you say."

Sam strutted on down the lane, a hero, a conqueror, the first citizen of Earth.

* * * * *

Somewhere out in space a thought message winged its way toward its far distant goal:

From: Commander. Exploration Party 3-127h

To: Bureau of Exploration, Intelligence Division

Emergency message emergency. Disaster has struck our expedition. Keep away! Steer clear of this system. One by one the men are falling around me, insane in such proportions as our civilization has never seen, a contagion caught from a member of the race inhabiting the third planet of this system.

Kee—p away! There is no escape, no remedy. I am prepared to destroy the ship and all it contains if I should succumb. Should my finger relax. Kee—p away! Steer clear. No escape.

First the composer. Then the psychologist. It's an odd world, a world of twin realities, where the contradictions are only apparent. To recognize it one must split the ego, the mind itself. Ah! Now I begin to see. It is all clear. The twin realities. Kee—p away! Kee-pa-way cree-pa-way stay-a-way way-a...



COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THIRTY SECONDS — THIRTY DAYS

*A Dramatic Complete Novelet of Peril
and Heroism Aboard a Space Ship*

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

PLUS MANY OTHER NOVELETS, STORIES AND FEATURES

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 7)

Danny, however, is actually inflicted with nothing more serious than an extraordinary amount of what Charles Fort termed "wild talents." They are serious enough, however, ultimately getting him in deep trouble not only with the police and the F.B.I. but with a group of highly secret psychic organizers who are conspiring to make much of the world's goods their own.

LET THE FINDER BEWARE! is unquestionably the most important story Blish has written thus far in his career. It is long on suspense, action, parapsychology and fantastic invention against a very real background of current New York City and its environs. It should hold all of you to the final paragraph.

Murray Leinster will also be in hand in December with his most recent and one of his most intriguing novelets, THE LONELY PLANET. This is a concept guaranteed to worry the Coles but which should hold the rest of us closely in hand.

His protagonist is nothing less than an organic, intelligent substance which in effect becomes a planet and which responds with doglike devotion only to the minds of men. Men being what they are seek to destroy it and the planet is forced to take action for its own salvation.

A story as different in outlook as this same author's well-remembered DE PROFUNDIS, THE LONELY PLANET has tremendous emotional as well as scientific wallop. In this instance the buyer need not beware of a thing except a most unusual and entertaining tale.

Third on our December novelet list is THE SHROUD OF SECRECY by Raymond F. Jones. This is the second of two sequels to the same author's THE ALIEN MACHINE, mentioned above, and in it engineer Meacham makes contact with the creators of the interociter.

In their Southwestern desert factory units he meets Dr. Ruth Adams as well as men he has known in the past as fellow engineers. Ultimately, when his work is assigned him, he is interviewed by Mr. Jorgasnovara, the mysterious chief "engineer" who has created the Arizona Utopia.

But it is, Meacham quickly discovers, a Utopia based on repression and fear—although he is utterly unable at first to put his finger on the cause of either. Little by little, however, he becomes better

acquainted with his new surroundings until, at last, he discovers their purpose.

THE SHROUD OF SECRECY is not only a great sequel to THE ALIEN MACHINE. It is a brilliant scientific achievement in its own right and an even better prelude to the out-of-this-world windup to the Jones series.

December will also have a novelet by Arthur C. Clarke plus a glistening array of short stories—culled from the selection of brilliant sf authors who have done so much to give us higher fictional quality than we have ever known—and a full quota of features including this department.

Also included, of course, will be a listing of those fans clubs which wish to report their existence to us. We expect to run this service-feature as a regular twice-a-year function, in the December TWS and the July SS from now on. So get your club listed if you wish to appear in our next.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

A NEWCOMER to this peristyle takes over the letter opener—and a very fine epistle we believe it to be, to wit—

NOT FOR ALL THE RICE IN BURROUGHS

by John A. Mercer

Dear Editor: This is my first attempt to communicate with those organizations dedicated to the printing of Science-Fiction, which have given me so much reading pleasure in the course of the past two decades. I have been an ardent, though silent fan. For at least the last ten years I have read and enjoyed each and every issue of all the various publications.

Over the course of the years, it has been my observation that no one particular magazine has steadily maintained the lead as the best Science-Fiction magazine. There seems to be a fortunate cycle of fine stories which appear over a number of issues in a particular magazine such as yours, then to move on to some competing magazine and eventually return again to the first, thus completing the cycle. Perhaps this is because the various magazines recruit, from time to time, a group of fine authors or build these fine workmen from its junior authors. Each of these men has certain basic patterns of thought which they follow in their story telling; that is, they have formulated various theories regarding the unknown problems on the frontiers of science, such as a theory of time energy, the origin of the universe, intelligent life in various parts of the universe and so forth.

As the years go by, some of their theories more or less fall outside the circle of plausibility due to certain scientific discoveries which seem to point the other way. Thus their work becomes dated or old-fashioned and other authors of a more modern school of thought arise to take their places.

My entry into the delightful world of Science-Fiction was made through the currently unsurpassed works of that great and vividly realistic writer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, in his portrayal of other times and worlds in the Tarzan and John Carter Mars series. The story I remember best from those long-gone teen age days was "The Sunken World" by Cozzens. Another story which I remember well, the title of which, I have since forgotten, concerned a journey to the

moon and a fantastic lunar civilization of winged men discovered there.

To the discerning and critical mind the reading of Science-Fiction is an opportunity to join (silently) in a discussion of the mysteries of nature by some of the most imaginative and competent men of our times. A competent mind, during the years, will find kernels of possibility in the shell of the stories, which, if linked together in the proper sequence, form fascinating theories of the physical and spiritual universe. By spiritual, I mean, of course, those things containing life such as mind ego being, consciousness and so forth.

Thus, by adopting the proper attitude towards it, science-fiction can be the basis for a general and liberal education, although this, of course, presupposes the type of openness and curiosity which derives pleasure in contemplation of the meaning and structure of the environment in which it finds itself.

I have just finished reading the June issue of your magazine "Thrilling Wonder Stories." As all your letter writers seem to do, I too have the urge to comment on one of the stories in it, "Sea-King of Mars" by Leigh Brackett. These Marston stories by Brackett are fine writing.

Brackett is creating a world through his graphic realism and constant attention to detail. The stories are highly entertaining packed with action and suspense, and lead up to a powerful climax. I hope there are more of these stories coming. I should like to see them combined as an anthology in book form.

The various anthologies of Science-Fiction published to date, have contained stories by a number of different authors concerning the same theme. Personally I should like to see a number of different anthologies published wherein the stories are all by one author. For example, the "Foundation" series by Isaac Asimov, the various stories by Henry Kuttner and so forth.

One of the beauties of human nature lies in the urge to criticize. The better a piece of workmanship, the greater is the inclination to search for its flaws. Thus, in returning to Brackett's story "Sea-Kings of Mars," I would like to point out what I consider its greatest weakness and make a statement concerning my point of view on this matter.

In the story, Matt Carter, in his own time period, entered the Tomb of Rhiannon, a god of the far past of Mars. Here he found the ancient god imprisoned in a sphere of nothingness, timelessness and so forth. Coming into contact with his sphere, Carter found himself projected a million years into the Marston past. Here he succeeded in liberating the god and was then returned by Rhiannon to his own time wherein Rhiannon was, now, no longer imprisoned.

Well then, how can this be, in Carter's own time period the god was originally imprisoned. If the god was no longer imprisoned when he returned, how did he actually portend his own time period, then the god had actually returned Carter to a different, though similar, time period or a different, though similar world.

Things of this nature have been explained many times as the inexplicable paradoxes inherent in the time stream, particularly when travel in time, that is into the past or future at a rate independent of the normal rate of the time stream, is considered or performed.

I should now like to state my belief that there are no paradoxes connected with what has been called the "time stream". Neither are there any paradoxes inherent in this so-called "time travel". The inconsistencies which seem to arise in the contemplation of this "time stream" and "time travel" are merely the incorrect conclusions arrived at by attempts to define time and its nature by means of concepts and inapplicable laws of action. In other words, these paradoxes show that we are failing to understand what time actually is and how it operates. They denote an ignorance of its nature.

Brackett in his "Sea Kings" story has apparently accepted these general misconceptions. Believe me, I am not criticizing his fine story, but a little contemplation on his part of the true nature of time, aided perhaps by Doctor Gamow's book "One, Two, Three, Infinity," might put him a little closer to the track of reality and open up to him many fascinating and unexplored avenues of story telling on this particular theme.

I must apologize for the length of this letter. There is so much to say, however, that it seems short, indeed, to me. I must also thank you for an entertaining and excellent magazine. Although I buy the new science fiction, I have been a regular and satisfied customer for many years now.

I have stacks of Science-Fiction magazines that I would be glad to send to any group that wants them, provided they have a worthwhile reason for wanting them, and will pay postage. I would be happy to correspond with any one of similar reading tastes since I know of no fans in my own home town.

Thanks again for many delightful hours.—2117 Wirt Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

Our only objection upon reading your letter, John Mercer, lies in the sex you have given to Brackett. She is indisputably and

attractively a female creature—is married as you evidently do not know to Edmond Hamilton, himself a science fictioneer of no small repute.

Your speculations on the nature of time are exceedingly interesting—they remind me in part of a clever little story written for us some years ago by Samuel Mines and entitled **FIND THE SCULPTOR**. It capitalized entirely upon the paradox you find so distasteful.

In short the problem it posed was—a man succeeds in reaching the future and there finds a statue to himself as the first time traveler, which he brings back to the present with him. His problem then is to figure out who made the statue, when and how. He never did find the answer. Perhaps you or some other reader—forgiving us for bringing such a problem back from the past—will have better luck.

WOMEN'S PLACE IS . . . by Rickey Slavin

Dear Editor: Here I am again. Why I spend my grudgingly culled quarters for your magazines I'll never know—except that I like them. Here I am, a freshman in Brooklyn College, trying to keep body and soul together on a mere pittance, yet I spend money on TW's. Of course, I should be miserable and rich, but I prefer happiness and poverty.

You know, stff is a disease, a communicable disease and an incurable one. Once infected with the virus, there is no release. Most of the victims are quite complacent in their illness and when sincere attempts are made to cure them they revolt. Wonderful illness!

I have a revolutionary idea to present to the ten-at-large who read your pages. As many of them know Rickey is a nickname and Rhoda my real cognomen. Also known is the fact that, while not as vehement or virilistic as chess Mille, Zimmer, I have been alternately sincere, definite and intense in my defense of women's place in the stff ranks.

However, I disagree with Astra in one major point. However we try to deny it the double standard is still in force, in stff as with any other field of endeavor. It is an avowed fact and the only thing any sensible woman can do is admit it and cease this violent militant feminism. I have found a deferring position vastly more rewarding than antagonistic insistence upon independence.

Show me the woman who has never been moved by some female's wiles. Show me the man who has never been unwittingly the victim of some smart designing female. Nature has designed man to play the protector's role. Let them, then, hand us carefully into cars. Let them hold us protectively under the elbow. Let them inflame their egos by ordering us around and caring for us. They love it!—626 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn 30, New York.

And why not? There is only one thing we like more, Rickey—namely having the little (or otherwise) women hand us carefully into cars—and pay and pay and pay. You and Astra will have to settle this between yourselves, however—but keep us informed via the column.

DUBLIN OR NOTHING by Anthony Roche

Dear Sir: In answer to your letter of recent date, stating subscription rates for your magazine, I was refused permission to send the money. I was hoping to become a subscriber as your magazines are nearly impossible to get here in Eire. If you could print part of this letter in one of your magazines in hopes that some reader in Eire or England who is fortunate enough to get copies would care to send some to me, I'll gladly pay for them, including expenses.

I have never read anything like TWS. It is tops in science fiction and your best authors are in my opinion M. Laine, R. Bradbury, E. Hamilton, L. Brackett. The others are very good too—144 Clansdale Road, Donnybrook North, Dublin, Ireland.

CORRECTION! **by Don Day**

Dear Editor: It is with delight that I note that after some ten years of reviewing fan publications in your excellent magazine, you have at long last reprinted in its entirety an article from a fanzine. I refer of course to Robert Bloch's notorious "Seven Ages of Fan" which appeared in THE FRYING PAN department of the June TWS. My delight was redoubled because this milestone in fanish literature appeared originally in THE FANSCIENT, which I edit.

Imagine my consternation then, on reading further and finding nowhere any mention of THE FANSCIENT. You stated it was the text of a speech Bob made at the last World Fan Convention, THE TORCON.

It is true that Bob Bloch was one of the principal speakers at Toronto and that his speech, which was published in THE TORCON REPORT, was an excellent one, well worthy of being reprinted. However: "The Seven Ages of Fan" was not it, nor did it greatly resemble the speech. "The Seven Ages of Fan" was written especially for THE FANSCIENT and appeared therein in the Winter, 1949, issue. It was favorably mentioned in your review in the May, 1949, issue of your companion magazine, STARTLING STORIES.

I am deeply gratified that your editorial judgment as to its excellence coincided with mine and delighted to have you reprint it. However I am saddened to think of all the lovely publicity for your peerless publication that went down the drain when you failed to properly credit the source. Bob Bloch, incidentally, will again appear in the next issue of THE FANSCIENT where his autobiography, a complete bibliography and picture will be featured in the AUTHOR AUTHOR department.

Of course you know and I know and all the FANSCIENT's readers know that the best fanzine material appears in THE FANSCIENT! but how can your readers know unless you tell them?

Yours, more in sorrow than in anger—3435 NE 38th Ave., Portland 13, Oregon.

How we managed to scramble it up we don't know, Don. But our apologies are sincere and our error was completely unintentional. We still think Robert Bloch's THE SEVEN AGES OF FAN well worth reprinting and hope you can continue to draw articles of a like excellence to your fanzine. There!

BACK TO BUCK **by Wilkie Conner**

Dear Editor: Speaking of a super-duper science fiction hero, as we were in the June, 1949, issue of TWS—one that would serve still in the same way Holmes and Watson served the detective story—I'd like to say a few more words on the subject.

Thinking back to the early days of sf, we naturally think of Buck Rogers. I believe many of today's fans received their initial dosage of sfism from the comic strip and/or the radio program by that name. The name, Buck Rogers has become sort of a trade synonym for any yarn pertaining to sf. Thus handicapped, this new character will really have to be something. He has three strikes on him before the first ball is pitched.

Let us consider what captures the public imagination. In the day of establishment of other great fictional characters, they came along the time of public need. Sherlock was created when London was being shocked by a great many unsolved murders. Superman was started when there was a great war-scare and captured the public imagination as a champion who could win a war single-handed. At the present time, we are still in a war scare—to us we are handicapped again. Obviously, another Superman wouldn't go.

Perhaps there is another kind of character that would serve to capture the imagination of the reading public. One who is capable of solving all the earth's woes without resorting to war or violence.

Suggest you get v.v. Kuttner and Bradbury and have them work out such a character. Because the world is crying for a peaceful solution to the various worldly woes, such a person to whom the world could turn for a few minutes while enjoying a fiction story would indeed be welcome.

Speaking of story topics, as we were some months ago, the late Sam Merwin, Sr., had a favorite observation: "There are only three main story topics—love, war and gold." In sf we find all three—plus Hank Kuttner's Hogbans. I shure do love them that stories of them that hill williams... yow-sal Keep 'em coming—1618 McFarland Ave., Gastonia, N.C.

Well, you've been getting your share of Hogbans lately, Wilkie. As to your super-duperman—we find ourselves looking hopefully at each manuscript we receive and wondering if, perhaps—perhaps—perhaps—this won't be the story. So far, however, no luck.

And there is always the possibility—probability is a more suitable word—that when this character does turn up we shall fail utterly to recognize him. Popular taste, while generally unerring as far as it goes, is apt to be highly unpredictable by editorial and publishing standards.

Perhaps this character has already been created and seen print—but has failed to find favor in the past. Perhaps he is lying fallow in the unpublished inventory of some magazine—yes, even in ours. But we somehow doubt it. We think he will be utterly unexpected and sudden when he—or she—emerges from some author's creative imagination.

In that list of story topics you wind up with, it is our opinion that Mr. Merwin, Sr., omitted one—namely religion, faith or what have you. God or speculation anent same and his various adorners has been a major story topic since long before the Bible was compiled. And it has certainly been a great Sunday supplement standby for the last fifty years. A quick check on the sales of the works of Lew Wallace and Lloyd C. Douglas will bear us out on this.

GLAD TO SEE LEIGH **by Rodney Palmer**

Dear Editor: Glad to see Leigh Brackett in TWS, this month with SEASONS OF HARS. Though I wouldn't call this the best of the series so far as it stands first and foremost as a good story. In spots it moved sluggishly.

I started anticipating things near the end of the seven-teenth chapter and I got the feeling the gal had so many words to go or else. Other writers handicapped by the same conditions have done worse. A fair to excellent job, good adventure, the kind of stuff well worth the old gummy quarter. A couple of sub-plots or something might have helped. A little thin.

Maybe it was in the wrong mood. I got stuck up by a couple of friendly business-like boys the day before I read the novel. Without going into this to the point of exhaustion, I think Miss Brackett, taking things a little slower, could have made a great story out of what appeared eventually as a good story. Let's forget it.

I had a lot of fun, reading the Hogben yarn by Henry Kuttner, who never misses with short works. (But what happens with his long stuff. THE POWER AND THE GLORY was pretty good and WAY OF THE GODS, but they weren't really very long novels. CIRCLE, etc. flopped.)

AGASSI SEE YOU LATER Murray Leinster's THE LIFE WORK OF PROFESSOR MUNTZ didn't have a chance. Under other conditions it might have been mildly humorous—but even then I don't know. I can never quite get into Mr. Leinster's long work, and only occasionally do I rise to a short story. (SKIT TREE PLANET was good and THE LAWS

OF CHANCE I really liked. But not much else.) Well, he's got followers.

When you say you don't want slanting you're not making a statement you can't prove. I've got a hunch that, though your books are wide open, the wary authors are still rutted in the form and method of the particular mag they first broke into. In time the boys might ditch the timidity and write the way they feel, the way Henry Kuttner and Leigh Brackett and Ray Bradbury write—and then we'll see things happening.

You said it too—it says right here—that a character will make science-fiction generally acceptable. Let's carry it all the way and say a writer will make science-fiction! I heard somebody yell Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a lot of stuff outside of the Sherlock Holmes series but nobody ever reads it.

Okay, Doyle was at his best with Holmes, but I say writer first, character second. Let's not forget that weird stuff has been tied to a tight little market for years and years. Let's admit it. Some folks are always a couple of steps ahead of everybody else. I'll keep watching for that writer.

Remember football—the four horsemen? and Baseball—Babe Ruth? The secret lies in genius that puts it over—I say Joe Louis kept the fight business profitable, and current characters like Gorgeous George are bringing back wrestling!—226 West 60th Street, Chicago 21, Illinois.

Stay away from holdup men before reading us in the future—please, Rodney! Your comments anent slanting are interesting. We are inclined to agree with you. But remember, we are still limited to what our authors send us, slanted or no.

As for the writer-Messiah stuff needs, we are still waiting and watching. If you have not read Doyle's non-Sherlockian works—THE WHITE COMPANY, SIR NIGEL LORING, THE ADVENTURES OF BRIGADIER GERARD, THE LOST WORLD, THE POISON BELT, THE LAND OF MIST, THE LAST GALLY, THE MARACOT DEEP AND OTHER STORIES, to name a few—you haven't lived, brother.

UNEDUCATED (?) FEMALE by Miss Ruth Bernstein

Dear Editor: Can an uneducated female get into the rat race? There I go already and I promised myself to write at least one sane letter to you-all to make up for all the nutty ones in THE READER SPEAKS.

Put me on the complimentary side of the ledger. I like all your stories. Maybe I don't understand all the science but I like all the fiction and why doesn't everybody quit squawking whenever a woman makes a timid appearance in a story? All scientists agree there will still be women in the 21st century and love is as old as time in past history and stands a good chance of surviving.

Can you tell me why so many fans are only content when slinging mud at the hard-plugging authors? If they don't like a story, let them write to the next one.

What's this about a science fiction fan club? I'm new but enthusiastic in this field of reading.

Wasn't that a new twist Edmond Hamilton had in ALIEN EARTH? Spooky but new—and the best in the issue to me. Hoorey for Leinster and Bradbury fool me!

Ouch! I aquire to think of all the back issues I missed. Ignorance is not bliss. So if any reader has some to spare, I'd appreciate them. Thank you and good luck—1931 Nelson Avenue, Memphis 4, Tennessee.

Somehow we doubt if you will remain stalfly ignorant long, Ruth. Good luck to you in science fiction fandom. And here's hoping you deal yourself some back copies.

YELP FROM DOWN UNDER by R. H. Harding

Dear Sir: As an old reader of THRILLING WONDER STORIES may I tell you how pleased I am to renew acquaintance with your excellent magazine? During the war I

was in the armed forces and had no opportunity of reading TWS. In the immediate postwar era the dollar shortage made subscribing to TWS a virtual impossibility. Having recently received a copy of TWS, however, I was delighted once again to meet an old friend. I find the magazine is even better than it was in the years preceding the war, the stories being interesting and varied and the illustrations first rate.

I have only one complaint—what has happened to the old Science Fiction League? I searched in vain through the copy of TWS and could not find it. Presumably it was discontinued during the war. As an old member of the SFL (No. 3345) may I request that you revive this excellent department?

Since the dollar shortage here is still acute and as we cannot as yet subscribe, would be grateful if you send me a copy of TWS or SS who have some duplicate copies to spare, would forward them to me—38 Central Avenue, Maryland, Western Australia.

Thanks for writing. The SFL, we regret to inform you, is currently in a state of suspension. We have not at the moment any facilities for servicing it as it should be serviced. However, a number of fan groups are agitating for a revival. Just now it looks doubtful but you never can tell. Hope you get your mags.

PRaise FOR BRACKETT by Lin Carter

Liddle chum: Last time, if you will remember, I bawled you out for printing the Van Vogt yarn. Not I'm going to praise you to High Heaven for pubbing the Brackett opus. Turnabout is fair play, to coin a cliché.

Miss Leigh Brackett (Mrs. Edmond Hamilton, so I hear) is one of the finest fantasy authors of her sex. The only other word-slinger who can hold a candle to her is C. L. Moore, who doesn't seem to be writing any more. Miss Brackett is also the best author in that certain corner of science-fantasy that Kuttner, Hassel, De Pina, Bradbury, Fox and others have explicated at various times.

SEA-KINGS OF MARS was undoubtedly one of her best efforts to date. Better written than SHADOW OVER MARS, better plotted than THE MOON THAT VANISHED, it shall remain on my list of the best stories you have ever printed. It was precisely the type of story I enjoy most—colorful, poetic, part fantasy, and full of fun and passion.

It was typical of her work, in that it concerned not love but passion—not anger but hate—not battle but frenzy. And, by the by, I was strongly reminded, whilst in the midst of devouring it hungrily, of its Merrittesque properties. There's been much comment and correspondence recently about Merritt and Kuttner. It's now my opinion that Brackett writes more like Ole Aba than does the orolific, multi-styled Hank.

I was particularly struck with SEA-KINGS' resemblance to Merritt's DWELLER IN THE MIRROR, the all his stories had basically the same plot. In Dwellers and in Sea Kings the hero was, unexpectedly, carrying around a god within him. In both stories he entered a strange far-off place (spatially or temporarily it's the same thing) just in time to precipitate the final struggle for power between the two strongest groups in the land.

In both the two factors were headed by girls who provided romantic interest at various stages of the plot (Emer, tho not the leader of the Sea-Kings, was sister to the leader and her word was important). In either story one girl, whom he eventually came to love, was on the wrong side. The hero was hot-blooded, passionate and cruel (Lur and Ywein) and the one who lost him, was shy, elfin and near a changeling.

And also in either story he pretended to be on the wrong side and near the end caused its downfall and left the land. Pretty much identical plots, yet look how vastly different the flavor and appearance of the two are. Now, La Zimmer, let us teud on Merritt-Kuttner-Brackett.

Both THE ALIEN MACHINE and MOUSE were quite readable and worth the paper I took to print them. I can't say the same for most of the rest, especially that Hogben thing. The series is wearing pretty thin.

There must be something basically wrong in my psychological makeup, for Orig Prem, Oona and Jick, Magnus Ridolph and the Hogbens all mean me cold. ALIEN MACHINE, by the way, was very competently written, smooth, mature and written with restraint. It fairly demands a sequel or two or six.

Pix were better this time, even with the year's worst cover to gum up the works. Why does Berg always use such pure colors? The pure green of the snakes, red of the doll's bra, blue of Heros union suit, etc., are all glaringly sharp. Send him back to art school and let him learn about mixing and blending.—1734 Newerk St. So., St. Petersburg, Fla.

Yes, we liked Brackett's SEA-KINGS or we would not have purchased the story, much less run it. But let's leave Merritt out of it. As you no doubt saw in the announcements, you get your sequel to ALIEN MACHINE—two of them, in fact. As for Bergey—why not pick on somebody else? If the colors seem bright it's because he was told to make them that way.

'RAY FOR MAC!

by Robert L. Freeman

Dear Editor: At last you have done it—or at least one of my favorite authors has. I have been reading TWS for nearly ten years and this is the first time I have ever been moved to write to any mag, but I must congratulate John D. McDonald on his superb story, "Like A Keepsake." If it is, in my opinion, one of the best stories that has ever appeared in any SF mag.

Thanking you for the quality of your magazine in the past and looking forward to many more stories of the type of "Keepsake"—602 Martha Avenue, Texarkana, Arkansas.

Brief and blissful—thank you, Robert L. We're glad you found KEEPSAKE so swell. And if you choose to write again—we hope you don't from out of pain. Next, please;

ON HER METTLE

by Ann B. Nelson

Dear Sir: I have just enjoyed the June issue of TWS, and especially that little sizing up job of Fandom, on the last pages, titled "The Seven Ages of Fan" which puts me on my mettle more or less. Pretty damn good. Gives us fans some ideas about what editors have to put up with, with us. But, oh well—it's a living, you mutter. I have no idea how you'd classify me, if you bothered to put time and energy on it—which you probably wouldn't—since I am no mental giant. Anyway I thought it would be worth my three-cent stamp and your reading time, to brief a few of my little ideas.

The cover is merely pretty. Could be better dramatized. Why is the gal gazing off into space, mouth agape? Brother, in her spot I'd have that sword in both hands to make sure I whacked hard enough. Or isn't it possible to be beautiful while one is being practical? And the sword in the gentleman's hand is a special one, to which much attention is given in the story, so it should really give off some kind of an unholy light or other. Of course my saying so doesn't help this issue but come future high moments—

Science fiction fits in rather nicely with my former studies, though I can't just put my finger on what makes it so. I've studied esoteric books since I was eighteen and I'm past forty now. Maybe it's that fourth dimension business, where science and the occult meet. That's the reality part, applicable to everyday thinking—MY everyday if not everybody's.

Fourth dimension means the space in which higher powers operate, unseen by physical eyes but seen psychically. Lower powers also get an occasional opportunity to take advantage through those who neither understand nor appreciate their psychic gifts. The way I look at it, stories of gods and planets, space travel and life on other planets, are possible history, unwittingly "created" through the use of the psychic power of the writer to read the etheric records, which—like the electric eye—exists as Eyes of the Ether.

By this means the gods (if I may express personal opinion) can know anything or all they wish to know about anyone or anything in any given time, place or space. Which covers a heck of a lot of territory. Besides, I aver, this stretching of the imagination is very good for the purpose of raising the consciousness to higher levels or at least wider scope.

I know I won't ever write science-fiction—perhaps some philosophy or essays—the letter-writing bug not only bit me, but near drained me! Now I choose correspondents more carefully. Knowledge cannot be communicated to the unseen—but it can be INFERRED. I buy the Writer's Year Book regularly, just to keep on the inside track in my thinking.

I'd like to see a slick science-fiction periodical on the market with the kind of drawings once published in Greek Mythology books. They were truly inspirational and worth while. I'd like to read good articles by leading psychiatrists, on awareness and hypnosis. I'd buy such a magazine, no matter what the price, before I paid rent or bought needed wearing apparel. What do you think about that?—2702 Malbourne, Houston, Texas.

We think you'll probably have to wait for that slick science fiction magazine—at least until this Sherlock Holmes character we have been speculating upon or some equivalent makes public demand for stf exist upon a far broader scale than it does at present.

As for awareness and hypnosis—it is our belief that plenty of competent material about both is on the market. Perhaps some of our other readers will help you out with the wanted information, Mrs. Nelson. We hope so. At any rate, your letter was a stimulating one—and thanks.

OSCILLATION BLUES

by Banks H. Mebane

Dear Editor: George Farrell's letter in the June issue of TWS raises the interesting problem of a mathematical representation of the time oscillation described in van Vogt's "Weapon Shops of Isher." The difficulty of increasing amplitude which bothered Farrell can be resolved if the constant B in his linear differential equation is taken as negative. It might be difficult to visualize a physical situation in which such an equation would hold—but in time, who knows?

The "actual" situation as described by van Vogt would require a somewhat more complex representation. If we plot entropic time on the y-axis with the zero point taken as the equilibrium position of the time of which McAllister, the reporter, was projected into time—and plot the durational time experienced by McAllister on the x-axis—we would obtain a curve resembling a square wave with increasing amplitude.

The plateau would not be perfectly horizontal however, since McAllister moves with entropic time while in each period. This wave could be represented by a Fourier series multiplied by some factor to give increasing amplitude.

The building from the Isher epoch is also moving in time according to a similar wave with a smaller amplitude and larger period. The motions of the two are related, so that we have a peculiar kind of coupled motion. An attempt to find a differential equation to describe this would really be complex.

The June issue of TWS was enjoyable. Leigh Brackett has the ability to write fast and moving action stories. I think her success is due to her great ability to project the reader into her situations. The type of story represented by "Sea-Kings of Mars," a sort of high quality blood-and-thunder, is a welcome change, but can easily be overdone. Don't print too many of them. I enjoyed most of the other stories, particularly the Jones novelet. Please let me add my voice to the chorus of congratulations about the enormous improvement in TWS and SS during the past year or two.—P. O. Box #1139 Wilson, North Carolina.

Thanks for the congratulations, Banks, but we're going to turn over your science symposium to—

IT GETS WOES AND WOES

by Michael J. Keenan

Dear Editor: Please, in the future, if you publish a complaint concerning one of your stories which involves mathematics and physics, have someone who knows a little about such subjects check the complaint. I am referring to the letter from Mr. George Farrell Jr. in the June TWS.

First, Mr. Farrell's differential equation is far from complete. It should be:

$$A \frac{d^2x}{dt^2} + B \frac{dx}{dt} + Cx = f(t)$$

where the additional term, $f(t)$ is some external force. To get a picture of the significance of the $f(t)$, consider a pendulum which is swinging free. If left alone the pendulum will swing in constantly decreasing arcs. However, if you were to give the pendulum a shove every time it reached the peak of a swing any one of the following could occur:

- a. If the shoves were small enough the swings would decrease, but at a smaller rate than before;
- b. For the proper values of the shoves the pendulum will swing without increasing or decreasing the arc;
- c. If the shoves are larger than the value for b the swings of the pendulum will increase indefinitely;
- d. If the shoves are given at some other frequency than

that of the pendulum when unmolested, the pendulum will begin to swing at the new frequency.

Try it and see.
The equation I have written above differs from that of Mr. Farrell only in introducing that extra force. Whereas he has the differential equation of damped oscillations (assuming that $B = \text{AC} \cdot 10$) mine is the equation of forced oscillations.

But there is no reason to assume that McAllister and the Weapon Shop would follow an equation of this type. This equation involves x (displacement) as a function of t (time). We want one which in t as a function of x (hyper-time). And we have no reason to believe that our ordinary laws will apply in such an instance.

I have oversimplified the above, so don't jump down my throat. Just look in any good physics or math text (I recommend, Guillemain: Communications Network, Vol. 1, Chaps. 1-11) and you can find the discussion complete. It is obvious that Mr. Farrell is a Junior, though I should have thought that he was a Sophomore if he hadn't stated otherwise.

I won't rate the June issue, save for a few comments. I am rather sick of the Hogbens. I think that the themes could be done much nicer without them. Let us not have long-winded discussions of art in TRS. Most of us don't read sf for art but are pleased if we find it.

I do think that you ought to be commended on the fine improvement TWS and SS have made in the past year. Keep up in the good work and you will have nothing but the covers to be ashamed of.—116 South Africo Road, Albuquerque New Mexico.

And you can have your old oscillations with pendulums, Michael. We prefer oscillations ourselves.

METRIC BEMS by Dic Avery

Pray thee, Mr. Editor, remember that you asked for verse
And then reiterated in a sentence hyphenated for verse
So curse the gods, eat well you may,
And rant and rave and rue the day
And pray to one of Bergy's Bems
Deliverance from these metric gems
And—what! Back up Avery—this stuff can run on all day—
oh well—

Pray thee, Mr. Editor, remember that you asked for verse
Ten thousand rhymes you cannot miss, and may it all be bled
at this or worse

Yerse,
—57th Comm. Sqdn., Fighter (Jet) APO 942, c/o Postmaster,
Seattle, Washington.

Pray thee, Mr. Avery, though you be flying
jets
Your editor still toys with radio sets.

So swoop down upon us with your jargon.
So technical it really is no bargain
So leave your belching BEMS on runways
bound,
And bring your crumpled anaests to
ground.

In short, while we perhaps did ask for verse,
We'll send it back in kind, although much
worse.

INMAN CHIMES IN by Arthur Inman

Dear Sir: I wish to compliment you on the novel "Sca-Kings of Mars" by Leigh Brackett, in the June issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories. It is exciting, keeps moving, is well-written. Can't we have more full-length novels of this sort, in particular more novels by Brackett.

I hope that you will continue to improve the quality of your magazine as you have been doing lately.—6 Garrison Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

Well, goody for us! We'll try to keep the novel riding high, Arthur. At any rate, we salaam deep thanks.

WHO'S JOKING? by Richard R. Smith

Dear Editor: So you didn't like my joke, huh? I didn't either. All in all, the June ish almost matched up with the Oct., 1948 ish which is the best one that I have seen since I started reading your mag.

Why don't you get someone else besides Bergy to do the covers? It is very monotonous to see one artist's work all the time. Versatility is very important everywhere. If you would only put a science-fiction cover on your magazine now and then, say, anything like a robot, space-ship, et al, you might catch in a few people with brains and imagination that are looking for your type of product.

Once they read an issue, they would immediately become fans and you could switch back to Bergy's gals for awhile. Your covers are very annoying. One always knows that a female is going to be on it and occasionally a male. It is just the composition, costumes and brilliant background that change. Pardon me.

SEA-KINGS OF MARS was not as good as Brackett's THE MOON THAT VANISHED, which no one seemed to appreciate for some reason or other but which I shall remember for a long time. THE ALIEN MACHINE shows that Raymond Jones is a technician or electrician or something. The question is—can Mr. Jones turn out a story with just his imagination and talent? WHITE CASTROPHES must be one of those books that Burks wrote while in South America "filling the well" (literary well). Why go to South America to fill a well?

MOUSE wasn't anything sensational. LIKE A KEEPSAKE had no plot that I can see. SEE YOU LATER was described perfectly by one of the characters when he described another story. THE LIFE-WORK OF PROFESSOR MUNTZ is a type of sf story that is not particularly enjoyable unless you happen to be a Hans Sachs or Marly Walsh. THE HOMESTEADER is typical of Blash's material—characterization is almost nonexistent and plot consists of a mumbo-jumbo of scientific jibber-jabber.

THE FRYING PAN was very good with Bloch's The Seven Ages of Fan. Fandom seems to be one big social gathering in which everyone is supposed to join a *fanzine* or two and try to put his own out. In the beginning, I thought that perhaps sf fans were fans of science-fiction but they aren't—they just use the *fanzines* to talk about politics and so forth.

TRS: This department is hard to wade through because some of the letters are beginning to be intelligent and reading them requires thought, which always gives one a headache. The editor comes up with a fine statement—"they tend to weigh a work's importance by the specific gravity of the subject treated." A truer statement was never made. Science-fiction and fantasy are generally considered to be childish and pipe-dreamish because they deal with things that supposedly could never happen. Also writers of Science-fiction are considered a little you-know-what and writers of mystery and detective stories are considered morbid and homicidal and writers of stuff like "My Seven Years With Great Ghu" are considered hot stuff. Pardon me.

Somebody give Edwin J. Moran Watson's needle. SF does not need a Sherlock Holmes. It needs a character that will be remembered and which can wade through almost any kind of adventure in any length of story from short-short to a long novel. No one seems to have come up with the character yet.

All Series characters so far produced by the professionals are very limited. Stevie Andro and Orig Prem are limited to time travel and Jick and Oona limited to household and family problems. Magnus Ridolph does not appear to be a very athletic person and character traits are null. Everyone hold their horses for "Mighty Man Smith" is doing his best to create a super duper science-fiction character.

The editor makes the statement that he reads all unsolicited unsolicited manuscripts and he isn't kidding. He even reads some of my stuff. After such kind consideration, I am not so "bleak and bitter" as described in my first crummy letter published. I thought Kickey was a man's name but evidently, he is a her.

Is Ed Cox really confused or do you guys really want letters double-spaced not over two pages as per a competitor? And who is Ed Corley? Eds and Editors seem to be popping up out of nowhere in every nook and corner. There must be millions of the creatures.—6 East 44th Street, Wilmington, Delaware.

We're not going to yawn through another cover argument. Jones is a very good-looking writer—perhaps the most promising to show since Bradbury and Harness. He is not limited to defense-plant memories either for his technology.

All right, who is Ed Corley? Anbody we know?

AND WHO IS ESCHBACH? by C. E. (no relation to Richard R.) Smith

Dear Sir: A few months ago I read "Thrilling Wonder Stories" you listed a book "Of Worlds Beyond" by Lloyd Arthur Eschbach. It is published by Fantasy Press at a price of \$2.00.

I am interested in buying a copy of this book and would like to know if it is obtainable in Canada. If not, can you please give me the address of the Fantasy Press so that I can order it from them.—Box 111, Tisdale, Sask.

You might get in touch with the Canadian Science Fiction Association by dropping a line to C. J. Bowie-Reed, Arts & Science Building, McGill University, Montreal 2, Quebec, Mr. Smith. Or you might write Eschbach direct c/o FANTASY PRESS, Reading, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Perhaps some dealer will get in touch with you after seeing this in print. Let us know how you come out.

SINK SAD SAUNK by Elizabeth M. Curtis

Dear Editor: Your recent invitation to write again is more than I can resist. Besides, there was another episode of Life with the Hogbans which always calls for a hearty hoot that should be heard all the way to New York. Unfortunately my copy must have been late, as I was quite unprepared for Saunk's appearance last Tuesday with the chunk of stovewood but I did get in a good chuck at Yancey. I dream like that sometimes but the wood is still here, which has been puzzling me.

THE ALIEN MACHINE is one of the kinds of stories which has "the faculty of dominating the (my type of) reader" (your comment, p. 146, June TWS) and I would guess that the "problem solving" story holds considerable fascination for those of us who are not adept at slaughtering BEEMs single handed or toting pneumatic heroines over hill and craag assisted only by the ancient Martian Evil-Eye Ray-Gun.

This brings me to the one feature of SS and TWS which puzzles me most. Am I to assume that the advertising in these outstanding publications that the average fan is—a complete physical wreck, bald, arthritic, asthmatic, and tooth-aching—2, longing for control over his broken-down condition by some secret power of the mind which, if he can't master, he will compensate for by—3, the desire to get out of whatever profession he now holds at which he is obviously a failure and ture to selling suits and shoes or erranding somebody and then learning how to prosecute him?

This is rather a mixed up sentence, but what I am getting at is—the average fan really a complete flop in his fifties? I have nothing against the fifties but I would like to write science-fiction myself and I do want to get the right slant. When the rejection slips say "Read a copy of our mag and see for yourself," does that mean, "Read, mark and inwardly digest all of the mag?"

I have interrupted work on a fine story on the theme that life begins at 140 to make sure that I am on the right track. You haven't had the chance to reject anything of mine from your slush pile yet, so I can speak freely.

Mr. Pinball (I mean Pinbald) and Prof. Muntz seemed a little heavy-handed but the June issue is not being returned for my money beck.—201 Veteran's Village, Canton, New York.

Most fans—actifans, so-called, that is—of our somewhat limited experience are far too young to have been a failure at anything. While they range to all ages and degrees the ones that make the most fuss are generally kids. Heaven knows they are bright enough to make a worry-wart out of the blandest of editors, but they've still got their teeth—as we know all too well.

Come on into the slushpile. The climate is wonderful, the rejection slip always

ready. More seriously—good luck when you do submit.

SOMEBODY LOVES OUR COVER! by Stephen Leigh, Jr.

Dear Editor: That's a pretty nice cover you have on your magazine. In fact, if I'd never gone past it, I would have enjoyed the book immensely. But right now I'm afraid my quater has sprouted wings.

Let's take the stories apart, one by one. "Sea you later," by Henry Kuttner. Somehow I get the impression that Mr. Kuttner is a thwarted magazine editor. So just to get back at the public, he's feeding it this trash in his own words, "What are you blabberin' about?"

"White Catastrophe." You said it! This piece of literary (?) dredge is laughable, but not as the author (again—?) intended it. The transition from tragedy to comedy is strictly amateurish. This story is a literary mess-terpiece.

"Mouse" was fair. "Like a Keepsake" was the best story in the lot. There was money well-spent.

Poor Professor Muntz. What a wasted lifetime! The story was horrible, to coin a word. For gosh sake! What's the point of all these incidents? I've written a good number of stories myself, but so help me Hannah, I'd never print such trash under my byline. Think of it! What if Murray Leinster ever becomes a writer! What a headcase!

But don't drown in your tears. After all, everyone has to live. Maybe these guys are just too weak to swing a pick and shovel. My hat's off and waving wildly to the fellow who thought up the title of the book. But I think that the fellow who wrote the title should write the stories.

Seriously, though, why not print more serious stories? That's what the readers expect from this type of magazine. Not a gallery of eccentric and sometimes downright wacky scientists blundering onto cataclysmic discoveries.—413 Pleasant Street, Gardner, Massachusetts.

Well, we'll print 'em if you folks will write 'em. Though we have a deep-seated distrust of anyone who finds the frivolous disturbing. It bespeaks a basic lack of any sense of real values. Here's hoping you like subsequent issues better, Stephen Leigh, Jr.

SECOND STAGER by Clair (I'm a boy) Gustafson

Dear Editor! After reading my first few copies of TWS I am enjoying the second stage mentioned in the FRYING PAN by Mr. Bloch. I'm but 15 and have no friends which are stiff addicts. I am also handicapped by the fact I cannot readily pick up copies of SS or TWS. Being in the same plight as Mrs. Westmen I enter the same plea. Please!!!! Any old stiff mag you want to lend or give—I would very much appreciate your sending.

As an amateur critic I might add I think SEA-KINGS OF MARS—dam good THE ALIEN MACHINE—very good (I like those endings). WHITE CATASTROPHE—ugh!!!! MOUSE—fair. LIKE A KEEPSAKE—good. SEA YOU LATER—I got a kick out of it. THE LIFE WORK OF PROFESSOR MUNTZ—good. THE HOMESTEADER—good. Don't rebuke me too harshly, I'm new at this game.—4408 Upton Avenue South, Minneapolis 10, Minnesota.

You won't be long, Clair. Here's hoping you have more fun than feuds.

BLOCHED OUT by William Clyde Warren

Dear Editor: Just found the June THRILLING WONDER STORIES lurking siniterly on the newsstand, and naturally bought same. As usual, the "Frying Pan" was my first stop. The stories always wait until my appetite for fandomania has been satiated to some degree. This time the "Pan" had more to offer than usual—the Bloch article.

Naturally, I applied "The Seven Ages of Fan" to myself. Upon close examination of this admirable vivisection of the components of fandom, I found myself to be loosely classed in The Fourth Age of Fan. I have been exposed to fanzines—in fact, I've even written for them—a very bad sign and one Mr. Bloch forgot to list, I might add.

Further, I find myself verging on The Fifth Age of Fan, that of wanting to publish my own zine. Unfortunately, I can't do this. My legs and hands are paralyzed as a result of a

track accident in my junior year of high school (May 1, 1944). I can type quite well in spite of the fact that I can't move my fingers. But I can't work a mimeo. So there you are. If I ever put out a zine, someone else will have to do the mimeographing. And at this point, I have no idea who that would be. The only fans I know are Redd Boggs and Art Rapp—I've written for their zines—but these boys are busy. Besides they live in Minnesota and Michigan in that order. I'd like to find a Kansas fan—if there are any besides myself. If you print this letter I might find one. Do you suppose? Well, like a true fan, I've written you a letter without reading any of the stories in the mag. Also, like a true fan, I know which ones I'm going to like before I read them. Come to think of it, I may not even read them.—314 West Main Street, Sterling, Kansas.

Okay, Kanfans, how about looking Comrade Warren up? He sounds like one who could use some stf company.

A LOT OF BULL by J. L. Bullinger

Dear Sir: In the June, 1949, issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories the "Sea-Kings of Mars" is an apt combination of science and adventure with the latter noticeably predominating. The all-over tone is suggestive of stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs that dealt with the declined Martian cities clustered around the dead sea-bottoms.

The scene of the story, of course, is based directly on conditions around the Mediterranean Sea basin in the era of the Dark Ages. Even the Marlian races pictured are suggestive of the Mediterranean races of that time and echo of the seafaring Vikings coming from the North and entering the Mediterranean by way of Gibraltar. Generally speaking, a very good story with strong characters and a plot that kept moving at a steady pace without a lot of unnecessary juvenile blood-and-thunder.

"The Alien Machine" was a story bordering on the pure science theme. Well written—there should be more like it.

"White Celestrophe" was another pure science story with just enough of human interest to take off a dull edge of textbook monotony. Jose Pindobal was not exactly a convincing character as depicted. In short, good plot—poor characterization.

"Mouse" was one of those short stories with the ironic twist. It had enough of the humorous touch to soften the irony. Well-written.

"Like a Keepsake" was just another story. No point at all. Surely, there are better manuscripts than that submitted to you.

"See You Later" was another one of those boring tales that are supposed to be funny and humorous but which drag along like the British austerity plan. The plot is so overworked and dragged out that if the word "humor" is supposed to be its classificatory designation then something has happened to your good tastes as regards humor. Even the Orig Prem stories, which are usually in a deep rut, are occasionally funnier than "See You Later." How could Henry Kuttner descend to such bottom-grade hack-writing?

"The Lifework of Professor Muntz" was another bottom-grade example of hack-writing with emphasis on "hack." Murray Leinster must have been in the same rut with Henry Kuttner in the June issue.

"The Homesteader" was good. Not an excellent example of Blish's ability but good enough for a short story.

Let's have more stories like "Weapona Shops of Isher" in the future instead of being stabbed in the back with clinkers like "The Himalayaches," "From Pass to Horse to Men" and "Monsters From the West."

I've had my say, so I'll shut. Here's hoping you stick to your long-range policy of combining action, romance, science and sex in the right proportions instead of harping on the one or the other. Verily I believe should be the keyword for your policy and it was exemplified in "Sea-Kings of Mars"—417 East Bloomington, Iowa City, Iowa.

Okay, we'll try. But your remarks on LIKE A KEPSAKE are—coming apparently from intelligent and reasoned judgment on the story—absolute proof of how no one of us can always be right. Yes, that goes for editors too. We pull our full share of clinkers.

ALL RIGHT, MYRTICE, DROP THE GUN by Myrtice Myrtle

Dear Invisable Men: Gee, how do you do it? I've tried that incognito stuff and it just don't work for me. Maybe

it's because I have such an outstanding personality. Himmmsn? Oh well, I knew that you'd say that.

I'll get even with you though. I shall bombard you and TWS, with so many unsolicited manuscripts that you'll scream for help. In fact you'll probably commit suicide, then all we will have to do is read the obituary column to find your name. See, the solution is simple! I don't believe anyone else could think of that. After all how many can get that simple.

I enjoy your magazines and think they are swell, but so are some of the others. You see I enjoy good stories no matter who publishes, writes or otherwise mishandles them. I must say this though. You have improved so much since the old "Saturn" days that there is no use in bothering with percentages. If going to a quarter did that I'm all in favor of it. I dislike Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, just as I dislike imitation silk when I can get the real thing.

Now for a little secret. My family disapproved of my choice of reading material, so I've fixed them good. One month I bought true detective stuff and talked of nothing else. Oh we had a bloody time. I murdered and—oops er uh, Well, I got them good and fed up with that sort of thing.

That didn't suit them, so I switched over to the confession fields and OOPS again. Well they were soon fed up with that. Then I switched over to passionate love, and proceeded to fall in love with all the handsome young men I knew. (Boy did my husband boil!) Out the window with that. Then the jolly old westerns. I didn't have to shoot many ornery old rustlers before BINGO. I was back on a Space Ship heading for outer space.

First letter? Sure. This stuff they drink out here will make you do anything. I'm not going to bother you with a lot of I-like's and you-shouldn't's here. I think you're doing a bang-up job. In fact if you keep on you'll really get banged up. I like to read the things you print or I wouldn't buy the mag. As a budding young author I shall not make any comments on the ones you write your stories, except that I wish it were me.

Now as to the poems. There you are treading on my territory. I'm glad someone is. I got kicked out.

I think that I shall never see,
A poet quite as bright as me,
My ode's are brilliant, and they're gay,
I don't know how they got that way.

Editors bent to get my work,
They never look at the other jerk,
"That's not the truth," you wildly cry,
For my shattered dream I breathe a sigh.

Seriously though Mr. Rush, I enjoy the things (you see, I'm all flustered) you bring each month. It is a pity that more people in the world can't spend their time building dream worlds instead of tearing down the poor old thing we have in reality. Sometimes if I couldn't find a wonderful place where everything comes out all right, I'd be ready to give up. No kidding.

I have posted my quota so I'll hush. I didn't have much to say anyway. Please don't take all the love out of your mags. I like it. You don't have to make it mushy. That's too much to take. Even at 21 I've been around enough to know that the kind of love that makes the stars jar off their rockers is nonexistent. Just have the love that builds worlds and holds them together once they're built. You can't go wrong that way. Above all keep up your high standard of story. They're all okay whether we all like them or not. With the millions in this country you'd have to be some kind of a deity to please them all.—9132 Pollock St., New Bern, N. C.

At twenty-one you've never known
The love that makes the stars take flight?
Then, Myrtice, if you're not alone,
You're in a far more awful plight.

But should you find it once or twice—
It can't be purchased like ice cream—
You'll touch the sun and find it nice
And no more slush pile for your dream.

BRAAAAK FOR BRACKETT by William Thiessen

Dear Editor: Brackett's back and you can keep her. You said, I know, that you didn't want letters which merely rated the stories, but without criticism there would be no such publications as "The Saturday Review of Literature." So may I continue?

Although I am writing now about Sea-Kings of Mars, her

other stories which you have run recently seem to me to warrant the same comment. From the content of the stories, I should think that they have been mouldering in your vaults for the past fifteen years.

Doesn't Miss Brackett know that the style of stf has changed tremendously since 1957? Not that stf should be limited to a strict number of plot motivations, but values change. A novel about the Civil War (I will not say War Between the States) written in 1866 might have been regarded as a topical novel. One written today would be called an historical novel.

First, the story line. In every one of her stories which I have read, the hero(?) has been a man from Earth who has become a drunkard, dope-fiend or thief on Mars or Venus. Not that I object to the portrayal of such characters, especially, but she's in a rut.

Also, the locale seems to justify, to her, the name of science-fiction. In Sea-Kings at the beginning and at the end there is a bit of stf. But I don't think there's enough to justify calling the whole story stf. It's more an adventure story, set on Mars, with fantastic trimmings than stf.

To give you a concrete example, here is what I mean. A story might begin like this—"Gliding down Broadway on the third-level conveyor, Jon Martin raised his eyes for a moment and looked up at the giant calendar-clock on the new Times Building. '1432 hours, Sept. 16, 2004,' he read"—so he doesn't notice the grayish mist, that good old "temporal stress" the conveyor is carrying him into.

It transports him to the Texas of 1941, where, knowing that no one will believe his tale, he contrives to get some clothes, gets a job as a ranch hand to support himself, since he doesn't know any modern techniques, which he can sell as his invention. He does some fighting the mechanized rustlers, who are stealing the rationed meat-on-hoof, and the story goes on in the standard Western vein for a hundred pages.

At last, he gets on the track of the rustlers and just by accident is near Los Alamos, New Mexico, when the A-bomb is being tested. Caught in the atom blast, he is returned to the 21st Century. Now, there is just about as much stf in the above hard little paragraph, as in Sea Kings. However, it has a setting in the West, instead of on Mars. Same difference.

Also, though this is a small point, can't Miss Brackett find some better titles? Nearly all of her stories are named Somebody (or Something) of Someplace.

The Alien Machine and The Life Work of Professor Muntz ARE TOPS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE categories. (I forgot to take the shift lock off.) Sequel to The Alien Machine?

TLWOPM proves, I think that for the perfect issue, all the stories should be written by Murray Linstead, Will F. Jenkins and since you don't like you use the same name twice, Brett Sterling. By the way, now that the secret is out, I am waiting to see how many guess right the next time you use Sterling.

And now, having given you freely advice worth thousands, I shall stop, using the words spoken by Effie Perrine each Sunday evening on the radio, Good Night—lessee, she works for Philip Marlow, doesn't she—Good Night, Phil—48 Remsen St., Cohoes, N. Y.

Maybe you've got a legitimate beef on the Brackettopus, Bill, but aren't you carrying it just a little bit overfar? At any rate, the letter was funny, for which, thanks,

MORE BEEF by Don J. Nardizzi

Dear sir: Being a silent, to date, exponent of the wonderful medium of escapa literature known as science fiction, I wonder if I may offer a criticism. I did not like your lead story in the June issue, in spite of the able efforts of Leigh Brackett. I have learned in my reading experience to shy at any story in which the hero wields an invincible blade like Arthur's Excalibur. Nothing, to my way of reasoning, is more incongruous in a tale of the scientific future than an awe-inspiring, archaic sword. If is the type of fare invariably found in one of your more inferior competitors' periodicals.

Let's face it. Swashbuckling is a thing of the so-called romantic past in which logic was an all-time loser and justice was based on the fallacy that Might made Right. Perhaps I'm prejudiced. But I like to think of the future as an age of reason. Real reason, not the type that followed the French Revolution. An age of economical, social and scientific battles by men of learning rather than single combat by stereotype heroes calling upon magic and superstitions.

[Turn page]

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I, personally, am a gadget lover. And that may account for my taste. But how far, far greater in scope was the short story, MOUSE by Brown. I enjoyed it immensely. Or the subtle sleuth-type expose of Blith's, HOMESTEADER. All your short stories this month, especially the riotous humor of THE LIFE OF PROF. MUNTZ, and SEE YOU LATER, were excellent fare.

This, of course, is merely an expression of my own particular preference in science fiction, and will only add to your headache of trying to please everybody. A big order, indeed. But all in all, you're doing a fine job, and more power to you.

May I also express my enjoyment of THE ALIEN MACHINE and WHITE CATASTROPHE. This was an issue which could not but please a fan of science fiction of my taste. You will, of course, get dissenting opinions, but those notwithstanding, your magazine is slowly, but steadily moving to the leader position in its field.—5107 Delaware Avenue, Los Angeles 41, California.

No, on the whole, most of the lads and lasses seem to have liked the June issue. Too bad you don't care for a dash of adventure in your science fiction crepe suzettes, Don. But as you imply, each to his own. Or should we say, "Chacun a son gout?" Or let's forget the whole thing.

RED-HEADED MEN by James MacGregor

Dear Editor: Given a fairly large room in any city in the world, and postulating its continued existence down the centuries a theoretician might predict that sooner or later eight red-headed men would play poker in it with two decks mixed together.

Perhaps even the most case-hardened experimenter, however, would begin to lose his faith after eight red-headed men had made up a couple of bridge fours in the room on several occasions, and would get to the stage of calling in the man with whom he had made the bet whenever four or five red-headed men started a poker game just to show him his winnings weren't actually in the bank.

Now I read TWS on my own system. I go cover to cover straight from THRILLING ANJUNE 25c WONDER to 65c GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS . . . CALVERT DISTILLERS CORPORATION, N. Y. C. The first three items in the implied issue, Sea-Kings of Mars, The Alien Machine and Mouse, are three of my red-headed men and it's not gin rummy they're playing. So before I look at the other five I hasten to congratulate you. If I went any further I'd almost certainly have nothing to write about, and you wouldn't like that, would you?

Did you ever notice that Leigh Brackett, Raymond F. Jones and Frederic Brown can write? I thought I'd better tell you. If there was an original idea in their contributions I missed it, but it didn't matter a damn. A good idea doesn't make a story. A good author does. The way they write makes it hard for the other authors in the magazine—on this occasion, at any rate. Don't think they can stand up to it. Excuse me while I find out.—21 Roschill Place, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Yes, Jymes, we've noticed—and seem to keep on noticing. You can add a few others to the roster though—notably Ray Bradbury, Margaret St. Clair, Frank Long, van Vogt and MacDonald. In fact, there is a lot of notably nice writing in science fiction these days. The above scarcely scratch the list.

FIRST OLIVE by Olive Morgan

Dear Editor: Take a bow; your fine articles break down my long silence. Liked your last one on hydroponics especially as soil conservation and possible substitutes for sustenance, when our future demanded them, have been of interest to me. Too few of us in this land of plenty realize how serious the situation can become—a bad drought this summer, following last winter's devastating weather, may easily pinch a little.

Can you imagine us on synthetic pills? I can't! As long as man's taste and eye appeal rule his stomach, the old regime will rule. Show me anyone who would swap a pill for apple pie a la mode and I'll shout, "There's a guy

from 3000 A.D. or thereabouts, on a time-machine jaunt!"

And how will we gels ever find our way to a man's heart if they go and ball up the vis-stomach route? Perhaps only when demand exceeds supply will we stop being slaves to our appetites and quit digging our own graves—without teeth.

So you see, your simply explained articles come first with me and then the reader's letters. From then on, I start in the beginning and read right through as they come. Cannot call any story bad. If it flows slowly in comparison to the previous one—what's wrong with that? Aren't we supposed to relax after a hearty meal?

No relaxation in June TWS! On the edge of the seat all the way. Liked the neat way Brackett tied all the loose ends up and everybody knew where everybody was at, come the end. Satisfactory. Not so with Alien Machine and Lita's Keepsake—the first was as uncertain as life, the latter as bitter. Both good yarns and gripping, despite tech details or gadgets some could not follow—me for instance.

Mouse? No too sure? Brown did not intentionally leave a two-way solution open there. Was Wheeler or Beautiful the abode of invading alien? But the cat talked, says you? Perhaps Wheeler's new ego gave him understanding of the cat's thoughts, even cringed when she felt this presence. "Forget it" could be Beautiful's way of saying to her master, "Don't worry about it, I still love you."

White Catastrophe—perfect relaxation after four-course meal. Escaped dub label by being interesting insight into everlasting ego of mortal.

See You Later—an enjoyable demi-tasse but brewed by Kuttner—how could it fail!

Life-Work of Prof. Muntz—pleasant interlude of after-dinner conversation, parts of which come back to dig the grey cells around into activity for some time to come. Murray Leinster can always make me think.

What'll No Bradbury? Not even next time? Surely you couldn't include that name among your "household names", so must not be among those present. With W.V., a longie by Leinster and A. C. Clarke, I'm already getting hungry and so soon after a square meal.

Say, wish you'd run a pronouncing guide with these queer sounding names. Like the promise Ampliphon. How can we say to our friends, "Did you read so-and-so?" when we can't even say it? Not until come next goldenrod time anyway—I'm afraid you'd have to sneeze that one. Only wish to add that after Flight into Yesterday, Sea-Kings of Mars and recent Until Fall of Mars—Fury from Lilliput comes up to them, you've really hit a new high.

How high can you go? And how are you ever going to take it—so long and no squawks! Anytime TWS and SS aren't worth the pittance we pay for them—better feed it to the dogs—and I do mean two-legged ones. Thanks for being kind and generous to the local fanatics. Agree with you in every way, it's swell and D. Day is doing a commendable job.

Seven stages of fandom was clever indeed! Rather disheartening to learn I'm but in the 2nd stage and shuddering to view that must inevitably follow. Block's touch was too clever to be confined into any limited area of readers. Glad to see you reprinted same.

Sorry I bored you so long. Many issues, one upon the next, piled up into this pent-up eulogy of the two-pages—double-speed, which I take it is one too many. And cannot even add—too much ado about nothing.—Gardiner, Oregon.

You sound like fun, Olive, if a bit intense. Take it easy there, will you? We're not trying to knock you out of your seat every issue—but we hope we succeed. Anyway, writer us another sometime soon.

AYE BRACKETT! by W. Paul Ganley

Dear Editor: It seemed to me upon completion of the perusal of Leigh Brackett's magnificent SEA-KINGS OF MARS that it was the best lead novel that has graced the pages of TWS since "way back when—since Kuttner's WAY OF THE GODS, in fact. It had everything one could ask for and more. Who did the pics for this one, anyway? I looked hard but wasn't able to find any signatures on any of them. It wasn't Finley but was almost as good.

SEA-KINGS OF MARS was much better, in my estimation, than any of Miss Brackett's former fides in any magazine during the past few months. What she did before then I won't have to say to you. More, more, more, Mr. Ed!

To my way of thinking (and probably to a lot of other people's too) if a lead story is good the mag is worthwhile, no matter how rotten the rest of the stories are. In this case, though, the rest aren't rotten.

ALIEN MACHINE was an average novellet—that's a compliment, in TWS (and SS) "average" corresponds to "great" in certain other provinces I could mention. The story could easily, I think, have been expanded into a fair novel; but

that might not have called for a sequel. This one does. It fairly sits up and begs. (Can you take a hint?)

MOUSE is squeaking for next place and gets it. Even though this was about the worst of Brown's stories since he, too, returned to STF, I liked it. Speaking of Brown, how about another novel from him? I rank his WHAT MAD UNIVERSE? among the greats, as do most other fans. I just about screamed over ALL GOOD BEMS a few weeks ago.

WHITE CATASTROPHE is a white catos—no it isn't either! But I just couldn't resist the pun. I hope that about a million other writers can. If not, maybe you'll be taking another trip to your favorite asylum again (that's a joke). But, to return to the subject, this other novel was not bad, really. I enjoyed it, but it is not meant for re-reading or anything like that.

About the only other story deserving of mention was Kuttner's SEE YOU LATER. An ingenious tittle. I presume he invented it himself. I have not, unfortunately, liked the other two Hoober stories—and, in fact, am not very fond of Kuttner. The only novel of his that I ever enjoyed was the one I mentioned at the beginning of this monstrosity of an epistle, WAY OF THE GODS.

Some letter-writers seem to devote their praises (when they can refrain from gushing speech concerning the man himself!) to DARK WORLD which, fortunately or unfortunately as the case may be, I have never read. Isn't it awful that you can't tell whether a story's sensational or horrible before you read it?

LIKE A KEEPSAKE. I have no words vile and slanderous enough to correctly describe this—this—this. I shan't try. THE HOMESTEADER was cute, which is all I can say for it.

THE LIFE-WORK OF PROFESSOR MUNTZ was very well written. BUT IN SPITE OF MY SUPREME LIKING FOR MURRAY LEINSTER'S WONDERFUL WORK, I THINK THAT WERE IT NOT FOR THE INTRUSION OF LIKE A KEEPSAKE I WOULD CONSIGN THIS TO THE VERY BOTTOM OF THIS MONTH'S SCRAP-HEAPI!

And now, holding our breath in anticipation (or, maybe, for some other reason?), we approach the vented and in-sacred precincts of TRS. THE . . . READER . . . SPEAKS! Hal With the boldness of an anti-Bradbury BEM, I have called this department by its real name.

I was surprised to notice that many of the letters did not praise THE MAN and some even took an opposite view. I think the objections are silly. It was a wonderful story. What if things didn't happen the way we think they should have . . . according to psychology or things like that?

Just because that makes it not-science-fiction shouldn't mean anything. Most of Bradbury's stories, strictly speaking, are not really science-fiction. Who cares? Maybe Brett Sterling but not yours truly.—119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York.

Well, there's no accounting for tastes Paul. Sorry we had to cut your letter. But we didn't cut any that hurt.

HELP!

by Shelby Vick

Salutations, Editor: HELPI! I've seen no silvery cigar-shape but my tomato is hard to wake up. He just is there, paying no attention to me. Light footsteps—or even kicks—don't bring him leaping to his feet. INVASION! Or maybe he's just dead. Maybe that's what I've been smelling. And all the time I was blaming it on Berger's cover. Tch! Maybe I should apologize. Maybe. By the way—his last one looked a little different. Hero wasn't Cary Grant. Well!

Not only do I have to worry about alien entities climbing into my cat, I've also got to watch out for a black line that might swallow this—and, sometime next week, some hillbilly is going to materialize in front of me and spit in my eye. I'm telling you this world isn't a safe place.

See-King—wow! What a story! Leigh Brackett can write! Right? That's one of the best stories TWS has had for some time. In fact, the whole issue seemed to contain darn good stories.

Alien Machine—a rousing cheer for science-fiction—and if you don't print a sequel to this . . . !

White Catastrophe—title prejudiced me against it. Didn't like it for some reason. But then I got into the story, and was pleasantly surprised. I was afraid at first that it was going to end up that he was dreaming, but I peeked and saw that all was all right.

Of the shorts, the Hoober story (of course) took the lead. Almost an entire length ahead, although Mouse was doing a rapid pull-up in the finish with Keepsake just a nose behind. (Altho I liked both stories, Mouse was an improvement over Star Mouse, by the same author, that appeared quite a bit earlier in a competitor.)

See You Later did get off to a bad start (there's something I don't like about s-f stories that mention s-f mags) but



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quickly recovered to, as I said, lead the field. It could even have made a fair showing against the lead novel.

Leinster, whom I use to like so much, seems to be dropping. Life Work was below his par. Not a really bad story, but nothing was particularly striking about it. Old theory, nothing very original about the plot—and, well, I thought the fat women on the bus was about the most interesting character. Why didn't she step on Mr. Grebb's toes?

Another Blisshedre. Spaceopus. Well, so what? I like such things! Blissh might be in for quite a career. Like to see what he could do in Westerns, tho.

Of course, the latter column was per usual. Editorial, tho, I didn't think so much about. Not bad, just sounded like you had something not pertaining to science that you wanted to say and had to work hard to put any science into it.

And now for a poem. (Deep, respective silence.)

When Thrill's last issue is published,
And the type is twisted and died;
When the oldest copy has faded,
And the youngest author has died,
Fen will open their Doors to Space
And commit mess suicide.

And those Doors were cracked a bit, tho, when CF left the stands. Why not give us back Captain Future? And, for CF alone, you could resurrect poor old Serge. And bring us the same old editorial policy. No changes. They were fine in SS and TWS, but CF was very good as it was.

Query: Got a wire recorder within reaching distance? I've got a 'zine I wente send in for your listening pleasure. Yup, WIREZ, the wirzen. If you've got a recorder, I'll send you a roll to review. And, while mentioning it, I went to find out if any readers have a machine, or have access to such.

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Okay, I've said my piece. I just went to repeat, 'TWS a good issue. Very—411 Jenks Ave., Pensacola City, Fla.

You ask for CAPTAIN FUTURE back?

Okay, you'll get him back anon,

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New series by Ed Hamilton

With which glad tidings we'll sign off. Yes, Cap Future is coming back in somewhat shorter—but still very active version—as a novelet series to open in **STAR-TLING STORIES** sometime late this year or early next. The dates depends on Mat-hatma Hamilton.

Well, we'll see you next month over in SS and back at this stand sixty-odd days from now. Keep the letters coming and thanks for those above. I've got to run along now—because I've got a date to see "The Great Dan Patch," the remarkable film about the champion race horse just released by United Artists, starring Dennis O'Keefe and Gail Russell. So long!

—THE EDITOR.

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SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

A MARTIAN ODYSSEY AND OTHERS by Stanley G. Weinbaum, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pennsylvania York (\$5.00).

Most of us who, in the past dozen years, have come in reading contact with the work of Mr. Weinbaum, wish regretfully that he had lived at least a little longer. For his stories contained so much of freshness, of



originality, of promise of greater things ahead, that his death at the age of 33, in 1935, seems definitely to have been sheer robbery to science fiction, perhaps to literature in general.

Therefore this volume of an even dozen of his shorter stories is to be cherished, kept in cool, dry places and handled with care against the many re-readings it will receive. For herein are the best of the Weinbaum tales—the grand A MARTIAN ODYSSEY and its sequel, VALLEY OF DREAMS, with Twererrrrrr, the first comprehensible true alien stf ever knew—the appallingly ingenious and funny van Manderpootz epics—the tales of Ham and Pat Hammond—the eerie Professor de Néant and his daughter, Aurora.

"So," in the words of Hilaire Belloc, "tell your papa where the yak may be got..."—the yak in this case being A MARTIAN ODYSSEY AND OTHERS, and, if he refuses to purchase the volume for you, open your own wallet or piggy bank and put your order in for it. This is an stf must.

MOONFOAM AND SORCERIES by Stanley Mullen (illustrated by Roy Hunt), Gorgon Press, Denver, Colorado (\$3.00).

This is a pioneer volume—the first real book to be published by a fanzine editor on [Turn page]

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his own press, containing, save for the drawings, only his own fanzine-published work, both prose and poetry. And while it holds the inevitable weakness of non-authoritarian self-selection, it is an interesting and rewarding effort.

The Roy Hunt drawings are fine stuff, beautifully reproduced, and while the poetry is perhaps over-eclectic, some of the prose sketches are memorable. We especially liked "Temple of the Frog", "Tavern of the Winds", "The Gods of Shipapu" and "The Guardian" among the prose impressions and "The Undertaker's Horse" best of the verse.

But that, again, must be a matter of opinion. Mr. Mullen, for all that he tends to be a Poe-seur at times, is a gifted and worthy pioneer.

—THE EDITOR.

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS



LET THE FINDER BEWARE

An Amazing Short Novel
By **JAMES BLISH**

THE LONELY PLANET

A Surprise-Packed Novelet
By **MURRAY LEINSTER**

THE SHROUD OF SECRECY

An Engineer Meacham Novelet
By **RAYMOND F. JONES**

THIRTY SECONDS — THIRTY DAYS

A Novelet of the Spaceways
By **ARTHUR C. CLARKE**

The FRYING PAN



A REVIEW OF FANZINES

SOME months ago we received from Don Day, publisher of that excellent fanzine, **THE FANSCIANT**, of 3435 NE 38th Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon, a set of ten "science fiction" postcards, decorated with wild, woolly and wacky drawings of BEMs, space-ships and the like. We wondered at the time just what their purpose was. Now, alas, we know.

The ubiquitous and ever-formidable Dr. David H. Keller has composed around them a story, apparently dedicated to the great Lovecraftian god of Fandom, Cthulhu, and his invasion of Earth. It is keyed to a satiric vein, heavy of hand to be sure, but shrewdly directed at the risibilities of sf fan readers. Our one personal lament is that the invader is defeated.

The volume has been well printed and bound by the Perri Press, Box No. 5007, Portland 13, Oregon, is available for 75c with the postcard illustrations mounted, for 25c without cards. Unless you already have these artistic (?) gems (!) we suggest you take the full treatment, as the story is meaningless without the pictures. In fact, it is sufficiently meaningless with them. But it's fun.

It Beats Us!

Fanzinedom, thy name is—well, we find ourselves at a loss. The cause of this setback is the appearance of a neophyte termed **UTOPIA**, whose editor and publisher seems to be one R. J. Banks, Jr., 111 South 15th Street, Corsicana, Texas. For his first issue

[Turn page]

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One Scientific Short	R. J. Banks, Jr. 10
Not Quite Defenseless.....	(470 words)
Two Science Articles	R. J. Banks, Jr. 4
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What Were They?.....	The Editor 2
The Editor Speaks.....	The Editor 11
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Anybody want to read a story, an article or a department by R. J. Banks, Jr.? Well, you-all know what you can do. . .

"Gaaaaa!"

Along the same lines one S. J. Gluck of 1047 Louisa Street, Elizabeth, New Jersey, self-styled "The Louisa Street Lamebrain," has emerged with what he calls a Slobzine (quite correctly too), entitled GAAA, which contains the following forecast anent its next issue.

Coming in GAAA	
"Diggiloo! Don't Dehydrate".....	By Me
"The Devil's Tool".....	By Me
"Blood, Juicy Red Blood".....	By Me
I leave you with this bit of verse:	
GAAA needs contrabass,	
Good or bad,	
Or its future	
Will be mity sad.	

Which leaves us with but one thing to say in passing comment, "GAAAAAA!"

Gobbledygook

SPACETEER, so-called "Florida's Finest Fanzine" and put out by Lin Carter of 1734 Newark Street South, St. Petersburg,

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Florida, with an assist from Bill Paxton of Dearborn, Michigan, has come up with some truly remarkable gobbledygook in its letter column from none other than Marion Zimmer, the sagess of R.F.D. No. 1, East Greenbush, New York. Writes Miss Zimmer, a former frequent contributor of letters to **THE READER SPEAKS** and **THE ETHER VIBRATES**—

Dear Lin: Donn Brazier's comments that coelenterata reproduce asexually will come as a surprise to the coelenterata. According to my collega zoology, coelenterates undergo two life stages: the polyp and the medusa. Reproduction is asexual during the polyp stage. However, in either stage, in some varieties, they carry on sexual reproduction by the formation of temporary gonads from layers of interstitial cells beneath the ectoderm layer. These may be male or female, or a single coelenterate may be hermaphroditic. They reproduce by a random sort of fusion of gametes. Brazier shouldn't be so blind to the Facts of Life. Even the lowly paramécie carries on conjugation. No matter how asger he is to prove a writer wrong, he should remabrar science is the authority and that Davis probably knew whereof he spoke, which Donn apparently doesn't.

Pity the poor cephalopod—he has to go through life without any pygitium. Personally, we thought the late Robert Benchley said all there was to say about the sex life of the polyp. But apparently we were wrong again.

—THE EDITOR.

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